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# THE MARRIAGE OF ST. FRANCIS

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# THE MARRIAGE OF ST. FRANCIS

*A translation by*

C. C. MARTINDALE, S.J.

*of*

HENRI GHÉON'S

LA VIE PROFONDE de ST. FRANÇOIS

SHEED & WARD

31 Paternoster Row, E.C. 4

G. H. M.

~~2009~~

M62A

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## PREFACE

THIS strange play has a preface, which I refrained from reading till I should have finished the play, lest an explanation of the play should confuse my own impression of it. I shall gladly say in a minute that my impression was the intended one ; but also, that the preface adds something—it throws light on the meaning of the title—*la Vie Profonde de St. François*—which I had found hard to translate. M. Ghéon does not separate this play from another, called *Le Triomphe de St. Thomas d'Aquin* : he calls Francis and Aquinas the two poles of the Catholic world, with neither of which it can dispense ; and I think that as the play on St. Thomas shows a skiey world of radiant translucent philosophy, serene and snowy peaks of thought with the white light of Olympus, as Homer said, running over them, so this play upon St. Francis reaches down to the obscure sources of the Saint's soul, dark waters that you might have expected that none would dare to stir. Yet as round the roots of the intellectual mountains of St. Thomas surge the dank mists of alien thoughts, confused impressions and blind instincts, so the unfathomed profundities of Francis rise in strong jets into sunrise and sunset and the "clear shining" of their God.

M. Ghéon knows perfectly well that you cannot make the whole of the history of St. Francis into a play. He selects, then, some few scenes that stand as symbols—they are so complete each in itself that he would not mind their being acted separately, if not every company feels itself able to produce the whole. You keep asking yourself, in consequence, whether



this is realism, or sheer symbolism. It does not matter, any more than the question need be asked about Giotto's frescoes. Moreover, the author, notwithstanding all the recasting and focussing of perspective which, in his knowledge of stage-technique, he knows to be necessary, quotes whole passages of the *Fioretti*—yet neither does this matter, since, as he says, nothing can possibly be more directly dramatic than much of those delicious stories.

The scene opens on a terrace at Assisi. To the right as you look, the decorative simplicity of some cypress trees. To the left, a staircase leads to the house of Peter Bernardone. A stone fountain in the middle. Beyond the terrace wall, the vast Umbrian plain, a sea of gold, melts into the infinite gold of the sunset. Very distant music of a carnival, and a voice is singing a song Francis has made popular :—

Joy is mine, and joy I sing :  
 Life I love, though life me slay.  
 Youth is mine, and crowns me king ;  
 All my heart is holiday.

This song, and its doctrine, ought to be strenuously remembered throughout this developing play. It hymns the praise of vigorous caprice : riches, to be tossed away, clean water, or rich wine as occasion serves : “ O golden night, too fair for me to ask more than thee ”—luck to all lovely mortal things, “ if but they know when to die.”

Three young noblemen. They call for Francis. “ How he must like that song ! It is himself ! inconsequent charm incarnate.” They shout and shout for Francis. He appears, splendidly accoutred. Come to the festival ! All nature calls you : the sunset ; the moonrise—the great Umbrian moon. . . The whole world is making merry—save Francis ! But Francis refuses. Incredible ! Yet—these gorgeous clothes—he must be going courting. . . Francis in love ! an in-

trigue ! who is she ? at least a princess. . . “ I know not who she is. But noise will frighten her. Leave me ! ” Delighted with their discovery, they go. The night sinks green and blue. A grave and severe music—and I will say at once that to my mind these *tableaux dialogués* depend enormously on music—and a figure veiled in grey approaches the fountain. Francis goes to her. That morning, he had felt an insane desire for happiness. He realised no less abruptly that when he had thought himself happy, he was not. He prayed desperately for a Lady who should surpass all beauty, all nobility in the world. He feels now how presumptuous he had been. None the less, he had heard a call, and this rendez-vous had fixed its hour and place in his heart. “ And I,” says the veiled woman, “ am she.” “ Your most humble servant.” “ And I am a queen.” “ Your servant all the humbler.” “ But I am not fair—nor rich—in my land are no lutes nor luxuries nor even rest—.” “ Yet will I serve you.” “ But my slaves curse me.” “ I will but bless you the more.” “ Why ? ” “ Because I love you.” “ There is no love in my realm.” “ I will bring it there.” Little by little she makes him strip his will of all that hitherto it had chosen. Then she reveals herself. Tattered and filthy clothes—gnarled and wasted hands—a face wrinkled and revolting—nay, leprous. Francis, at each new revelation writhing with disgust, yet surmounts his horror, and at last kisses her. Then the moon rises and transforms her rags into the cobwebby silken shimmer of Giotto’s fresco of the Lady Poverty and they sit side by side on the fountain’s foot, and break her bread together and drink the cold water and they exchange their rings. Since the transfiguration of Poverty, an incredibly sweet music has wrapped the whole scene in tenderness : across it a nightingale is heard. Francis pauses. “ You cannot afford to listen to that yet, Francis. Only yesterday it was singing : Glory to Francis Bernardone ! you cannot



listens till it sings Glory be to God." Francis goes slowly up into the house : Poverty fades into the moonlight : the scene becomes filled with the delirious pæan of the nightingale.

In the second scene, Francis " builds God's Church." You see the crumbling porch of St. Damian's beside the parched road, a dusty fig-tree topping the wall, the staring sky—that is all.

The scene is good, not least for this reason, Ghéon has left us in no doubt about the reality of Francis's choice of Poverty. Here is no romantic caravanning, no graceful simplicity, suggested. Lady Poverty is Penury, Destitution, something very grim. But even so, the stage had been flooded with mysterious moonlight : nightingales had sung : there had been fragrant breezes from the enormous plain. Here, dust, street-boys and their jeers, obese citizens and respectable burghers and their comments : a tired priest who knows not what to think—save that he remembers that he had seen Francis apparently in ecstasy and knows he will never forget the silence of all the world while Francis prayed, nor his calm joy when the prayer ended and the work began. Into the harsh scene some tenderness finds its way, when Francis blesses the three stones that are all he has collected ; humour, when he turns the " simple-minded man " into his first living stone, and the old priest into another, and Bernard da Quintavalle into the third. And a mellow spirituality, like fountains playing in the sunset, when Francis, to win hearts and help, sings his improvisation—" I am a king's son, a king's son, the greatest king in the world." Altogether you see that the building of God's church, His church of stones, His church of souls, is no magic task, as when at Apollo's music Ilion like a mist rose into towers, but a very grim piece of work, such as most Christians have to do for most of their life.

The third tableau is much suaver. You see a wood

not far from the town. A campanile sends distant voices of bells that ring to welcome Francis. The little band of Friars Minor has been forming itself—Brother Leo, the little lamb of God, Brother Juniper, Brother Masseo and Brother John are there. They exchange naive chaff with peasants who have come to see the Saint but don't at all want to be caught up into his net—as, before the scene closes, indeed they are. After a while the historic contest of humility between Francis and Leo takes place, and the declaration of what makes the perfect joy—to be innocently scorned and derided for Christ's sake. But Francis, miserable to see that people despite himself esteem him, and finding in his very brethren occasion for fault, since they praise him and seek to make him believe in himself, longs to withdraw from all his active life, and for a while is in fact left to pray. Then the birds enter. Whether Ghéon is right to wish them to be acted by children, I know not. I doubt whether we are simple enough to accept quite such a pantomime. For my part, I might even like some cinema mechanism to fill the stage with the sweep of swallows, the fluttering of thrushes and the shadowy apparitions of rooks and owls and doves, and leave the rest to voices arranged as those who know about such things judge best, and to the music that from now on sprays about the scene. I hear a music that reminds me of, but transcends, the ecstatic trills and arpeggios and the deeper more mellow notes of the second act of *Siegfried*—transcends them, as Francis himself transcends that super-bully. A clearer love, a purer courage, must be in all this bird-song, that rises into a real *Te Deum* of joy when Francis makes the birds join in a sheer ecstasy of music as they sing Praise to God. Then they fly off, in four battalions, crosswise, over the sky, and Masseo returns to say that those whom he has asked agree that Francis must not retire into any hermitage, but continue to preach and to work. The Saint submits: Let us go and preach the Cross if we



may no more carry it. Can we not do both? asks Leo. God grant it, answers Francis, and the words echo through the redoubled clamour of the bells, and the cries of Long live the Saint, as the crowds draw near.

Perhaps it is a law of life that men must be somehow crucified. Those who are not, perhaps never fully live. If you turn to Nature and adore her, she will crucify you, but you have made an idol of what should have been God's image, and the crucifixion is a barren one. Francis, having crucified his will so well as he knew how to, found himself indescribably grown harmonious with all nature: now he is to be called to a yet deeper crucifixion, and will be in profounder harmony with God. Does that sound somehow less warm, less rich and coloured—more, shall I say, metaphysical, theological, scarcely a thing for us, who live in concrete worlds? Perhaps, till we are sure that God is the very archetype of all reality, and alone sustains it even as He created it, and that whatever it has of concrete is His gift. It is at least in keeping with the Catholic doctrine of the Incarnation, that not only is he, who is in communion with God, necessarily in communion with all that is united with God, and all things that are true and good and beautiful, *are* so united with Him, but he wins this communion not otherwise than through Christ, who reaches from highest to lowest, from end to end, marrying in Himself the human with the divine. But then, Christ is too, the archetype of crucifixion. The next scene will therefore show you the black wood on Mount Alverna. A ravine divides the stage, crossed by a little bridge: Francis will pass it, bidding his friends wait for him on the hither side and not draw near. He leaves them, and forthwith Alverna becomes both Mountain of Temptation and Gethsemane. A "slow rough music" has figured the laborious ascent: continually I am reminded of what Wagner might have written had he been a Christian or St. John of the Cross, had he been a Wagner. Here

is the music that prefaces the last act of *Tannhäuser*, transfigured. It recurs, marking the passage of several days of Francis's fast. You see him at last broken and exhausted, exhausted in presence of the Trinity that he contemplates but cannot see, nor hear, nor reach. Fainting, even he, in soul, he asks for a little help. And an Angel appears to comfort him. A single note of the eternal Hymn is heard, but the note develops itself through all its harmonics and overtones, and fills the world. Francis, unable to tolerate even one note more, remains in ecstasy. The angel goes : but Brother Leo, passing the forbidden bridge, sees him in rapture there, and hears him thrice ask God, to whom he is gathered now so closely, Who art Thou, Lord most sweet ? and who am I, Thy vile and useless servant ? And thrice, in the heart of the wood, a dim radiance throbs, and a voice like music answers. Leo shrinks away : but Francis hears him : and, having caused him to confess what he has seen and heard, makes him read from his book some sentences of Christ's Passion. Then Leo goes, and another Angel calls Francis into the forest.

A storm sweeps up. What moon there was, is drowned. The Friars in fear come as near to the bridge as they dare, and huddle down beside it. The forest howls in the black wind : rain hisses in the branches : the music towers tumultuously till it reaches a shriek so sweet as to be agony and there is a blinding flash of lightning. Brother Illuminato, fallen into ecstasy, whispers : "The first Nail enters the right hand !" A space, during which the music gathers itself again and mounts to a like climax ; and a third and a fourth time it does so ; and after the fifth time, a terrific roll of thunder. "The Lance pierces his side—and the Heart of God outpours itself upon us." But the music now unfolds itself into a wide seraphic melody and a strange dawn rises across the wood, only to pass back into the calm of moonlight and the night. Francis returns, hands hidden in sleeves, and walking with



great pain. Little by little they force him to tell what he has experienced, and together they go back into the plain, he having already passed through death, so that within his anguished body his soul tastes perfect joy. And, as the earthly dawn comes at last amid the song of waking birds, they disappear, intoning the Canticle of the Sun.

I may be wrong, but I wish that the play had ended here, or ended otherwise. There is another tableau : the Glorification of St. Francis. This takes place in the convent of the Poor Ladies, nuns of St. Clare, and amid their cries of desolation the body of Francis is brought to them. The Friars and the Sisters join in their laments and their panegyrics, and the three Ladies Poverty, Chastity and Obedience appear and glorify him too. If I saw this acted, or meditated longer upon it, I might like it : it creates some sort of climax. Yet I would rather have watched the last blessing given by Francis from the hill-side to Assisi : I would rather have seen the long struggle of the Franciscan spirit to maintain itself in a world that understands little enough of it. But I may well be wrong : perhaps I am asking for sentiment, and the Latin mind is perhaps at least consistent in wishing to contemplate the triumph after the battle and the wounds.

The play is surely good, because you need know nothing of the life of Francis in order to understand it. The intoxicating loveliness of the Umbrian sunset is quite enough to make you enter, in the first scene, a whole world of beauty seemingly not only good, but good *enough*—perhaps the commonest of all false judgments, and such as to turn the image, as I said, into the idol ; certainly such as to persuade the sensitive soul so to accept impressions as to dwindle beneath their caress till suddenly the nerves have grown too old to register impressions and the man finds he has shrivelled into dried fibres of what he was or seemed to be. There has been “taken away even that which he

seemeth to have." Happy indeed if he has not so been possessed by the Unholy Ghost of passion that the well-spring of light within him has been first clouded and then extinguished by its heavy clouds. If the "light within him" has "become darkness, great indeed is that darkness."

By God's goodness, pleasure is not happiness. Francis found that when he thought he was happy, he was not. And he had first to learn the misery and then the lightsomeness of doing without things, and then, the strong tonic of work. After you have well understood that life does not mean having things, but doing things, you may realise that it is not even doing things, but, being something, a consummation that may require first the stripping yourself of all things, and then the testing of yourself by work within which you are growing to your selfhood. We shall seldom get anywhere without a cruel experience of negation, nor without the gruelling experience of quite unselfish action. Without the grace of God, such negation indeed makes you dwindle and shrink. It would end in hell, which is the ultimate negation, egoism, isolation. And without that grace, the builder of a house unbuilt by God labours but in vain, and in vain the watchman wakes. But where the Holy Spirit is, the "dear guest of the soul," and all the exquisite things that the *Veni Sancte Spiritus* says of Him, the stripped soul enters swiftly into communion with all that is, with the Wolf no less than with the little birds of God. Of the deeper Crucifixion, and the deeper union, this is hardly the place to speak. It is possible that the play may pass into a meditation, and the applause into the silence that is his who has heard God say to him: "Hush! realise that I am God," and that prolongs itself into that heavenly silence heard by John when even the upsurging thunderous *Sanctus* smoothed its waves into the eternal peace.

\* \* \* \* \*



Provided that the play be acted without the remotest suspicion of sentimentality, of pomposity, of pseudo-mysticism, of pose (ecclesiastical, or of the stage), it must admit us to some at least of the profundity of the fathomless life of Francis.

C. C. MARTINDALE, S.J.

## ACT I

*The public piazzi of Assisi. Left: the solid, squat house of Peter Bernardone, the merchant-draper. Right: a clump of cypresses. A stone fountain centre. If you like, a terrace-parapet at back, whence can be seen the wide Umbrian plain with its enormous sky. The air is full of the golden dust of sunset. Distant intermittent music of some festa. The youthful voice of a passer-by sings—*

Joy I love and so I sing :  
Life I love, though life me slay :  
Youth is mine, and crowns me king—  
All my heart is holiday.

Water in my cup is good,  
Water flowing free and fine.  
Better, be it understood,  
Half a farthing's worth of wine !

Give me butterfly-delight !  
I, another butterfly,  
Choose it, chase it out of sight,  
Find it, fondle it, and die.

Give me silver, give me gold,  
Though I toss them both away  
Swift as rain and swift as cold  
Strip the roses off the spray.

Night ! beneath thy golden wing  
In contentment lost I lie.  
Life and luck to mortal things  
If they know but when to die !

*Pause. The voice is heard again, further and further off. Three young and brilliant noblemen enter R.*

FIRST NOBLEMAN. What song is that ?

SECOND NOBLEMAN. The last new thing from Provence. Francis Bernardone got it from a troubadour friend of his and translated it.

THIRD NOBLEMAN. No wonder he loves it. It's himself all over: It starts for who knows whither, and back it comes, and ends by doubting the lot: it serenades life and it summons death; and it's as inconsequent and as delightful as Francis is himself.

FIRST NOBLEMAN. Never mind, provided it keeps you moving and gives you an hour of dream! One doesn't want to know where one is going,—provided one goes! If Francis was logical, he would be still in business, and our pleasures would lack their poet. I love poetry, because poetry makes all the world so delightfully confused: a tapestry with no theme—a scurry of coloured threads across the loom!

SECOND NOBLEMAN. Three cheers for rhyme, then. Is he all right again ?

FIRST NOBLEMAN. Who ?

SECOND NOBLEMAN. Francis.

FIRST NOBLEMAN. I don't believe in his illnesses any more than I do in his adventures. He found that a temperature provided him with a new sort of dream, and so he cunningly cultivates temperatures.

SECOND NOBLEMAN. Do you really think he squanders his health as he does his money ?

FIRST NOBLEMAN. Why not ? The only purpose in life he admits is excitement and illusion and as much of both as possible. It seems to suit him.

SECOND NOBLEMAN. And our life suits us !

FIRST NOBLEMAN. True for you ! (*goes left*). Let's knock. He can't mind our knocking him up on such a lovely night. And at the hour when wise men go to



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bed, and fools, like us, get up. (*They all go and knock at Peter Bernardone's door. Silence. They knock again. Silence. Then they step back and shout.*)

Francis !

SECOND AND THIRD NOBLEMEN. Francis !

FIRST NOBLEMAN. Has the fever burnt up all your energy ?

SECOND NOBLEMAN. The plain from here to Perugia is like a lake of gold !

THIRD NOBLEMAN. But in another minute it will lie victim to the powers of darkness !

FIRST NOBLEMAN. But as for us, we shall have Night's crown, that a thousand stars do deck, to light us on our way. (*They knock again: no answer.*) He's gone to earth. (*He resumes his lyrical entreaties.*) Francis, remember the days when you went off to La Pouille to fight !

SECOND NOBLEMAN. Remember the night when you lost 500 ducats and then staked your cloak !

THIRD NOBLEMAN. Remember the race when you beat us by a head on that mad horse that fell dead at the finish !

FIRST NOBLEMAN. Francis !

SECOND NOBLEMAN. Francis !

THIRD NOBLEMAN. Francis ! (*A light is seen on the second floor.*)

FIRST NOBLEMAN. There's his window ! The dream is done. He wakes. (*The window opens. FRANCIS leans out.*)

(*All together.*) Francis !

FRANCIS. You're waking everybody up. Hush. I'm coming down.

*They give a cheer. The door opens. Francis appears on the steps, gorgeously costumed.*

FIRST NOBLEMAN. Good evening !

(*They run to him and salute him.*)

FRANCIS. Have I been keeping you waiting ?

FIRST NOBLEMAN. We've been yelling under your window for at least an hour.



THIRD NOBLEMAN. At least !

SECOND NOBLEMAN. And knocking at your door as if we were deaf.

THIRD NOBLEMAN. And we went so far as to compose a trio on your name, like our troubadours, to pass the time !

FIRST NOBLEMAN. Francis !

SECOND NOBLEMAN. Francis !

THIRD NOBLEMAN. Francis !

FIRST NOBLEMAN. Hast thou burnt up in thy fever all thy youth ?

SECOND NOBLEMAN. The plain Perugian is a lake of gold ! (*To THIRD NOBLEMAN, who fails to pick the song up*). Well ?

THIRD NOBLEMAN. I've forgotten my line. (*They laugh*).

FRANCIS. I'm so sorry !

FIRST NOBLEMAN. Well, you've lost something worth having.

FRANCIS. I'm quite sure of that. What can I do for you ?

FIRST NOBLEMAN. Give us your company. The moon is going to rise, and I think she will be full. You can hear the band hymning the new wine ! And there is racing at the Ponte San Giovanni ! We have the best horses in the town. If your purse has run dry, for once ours hasn't. And then—ah ! Nature ! Look at her—the shooting-stars, the scent of the wine-vats and the reddened vines, the crickets in the grass, for every blade a cricket . . . and, in the dense cypresses, the last nightingales of summer. One would say that all the world has given itself rendez-vous for love of its own enchantment—there is but one thing lacking—Francis !

SECOND AND THIRD NOBLEMEN. Francis !

FIRST NOBLEMAN. But without Francis, Nature has gone stale. She has no more sanity nor song.

FRANCIS. (*gravely but gently*). Well, no, my friends. I won't come out.

(*All together*). You won't come out ?

FRANCIS. I can't.

FIRST NOBLEMAN. Robert ! Robert ! Shut his door ! Shut him out of his home ! Shut him into the prison built of liberty, of magic, of adventure !

FRANCIS. No, no. Don't play the fool. If I say no, I've got my reasons, and they're good ones.

FIRST NOBLEMAN. Reasons for refusing a pleasure that offers itself are invariably bad.

SECOND NOBLEMAN. Especially if you refuse it to friends who would share it.

FIRST NOBLEMAN. Come along ! Don't be coy !

FRANCIS. Oh, I'm not in the habit of being that. I don't regard myself as indispensable. I'm not so vain as that. Any other night I'd have come—but to-night. .

FIRST NOBLEMAN. What is there special about to-night ?

SECOND NOBLEMAN. Aren't you well ?

FRANCIS (*cryptically*). I haven't been well. I'm still not very well. But I'm getting better—every day. Perhaps I shall be quite well to-morrow—at least so far as any man can recover from the ill that all men suffer !

THIRD NOBLEMAN. Do you mean love ?

FRANCIS. If you like.

FIRST NOBLEMAN. Aha ! aha ! O sky, O stars, O moonrise ! The Lord Francis Bernardone is in love !

*They all laugh.*

FRANCIS. Don't laugh.

THIRD NOBLEMAN. Now, it's all clear, my lords. Observe this silken hose, this gold-fringed cloak, this feather in his cap, this fretted chain, this ring. Contemplate this hair, newly smoothed and curled. The page of the Queen of France is no better dressed when she calls on an ambassador ! What, tell me, is this mysterious dance, this water-festival, this court of love held secretly in full moon-light, where-to thou art for going without us ?



FIRST NOBLEMAN. Tell us, Francis !

SECOND NOBLEMAN. Tell us, Francis !

THIRD NOBLEMAN. You wouldn't *not* tell us ?

FRANCIS (*avoiding them*). You'll know to-morrow. I can't tell you yet.

FIRST NOBLEMAN. Then we'll stay where we are.

*The others echo him.*

FRANCIS. You mustn't stay here. Now I'm speaking as friend to friends. I'm waiting—I'm waiting for someone here in this square.

FIRST NOBLEMAN. Someone ?

SECOND NOBLEMAN. A lady ?

THIRD NOBLEMAN. Tell us her name.

FRANCIS. I don't know it.

FIRST NOBLEMAN. Oh splendid ! That's the sort of romance I love ! At night, in secret, and a fair Un-named ! I must write a tale about this. The mysterious interview of Francis Bernardone with the Anonymous Princess !

SECOND NOBLEMAN. She's beautiful ?

THIRD NOBLEMAN. Young ?

SECOND NOBLEMAN. Rich ?

FIRST NOBLEMAN. I tell you, she's a princess, a princess—unless she's a queen !

FRANCIS. I don't know who she is. But she is worthy of all homage. That is why I put on my fine clothes and my jewels. That's all I can tell you. Now you know as much as I do.

FIRST NOBLEMAN. Well, gentlemen, let us forthwith compose the bridal hymn : the tune of the moment—you know—(*He hums the tune of "Joy I love."*).

FRANCIS. My dear friends—please—if she heard you singing and laughing the noise would frighten her. She doesn't like such things. Do please leave me.

SECOND NOBLEMAN. My very dear Francis, how solemn you are !

FRANCIS. Must I ask you twice ?

FIRST NOBLEMAN. Very well, very well, we'll go.

And I promise you in the name of all of us, that we won't hide behind the trees to spy on the arrival of your Unknown. We'll be off yonder and drink, if you please, to your good luck and hers. All that you hope, we hope.

THE THREE NOBLEMEN. Good-bye, Francis.

FRANCIS. Good-bye. Thank you.

*They exit Left. The night falls dark. The sounds of the merry-making die. A pure, grave, discreet music announces the advent of the Unknown. She is draped in grey and black and only her outline can be seen. She enters right, slowly, and stops in front of the fountain. Francis steps towards her. The music ceases.*

THE UNKNOWN. Francis!

FRANCIS. Madam . . . . .

THE UNKNOWN. You do not know me?

FRANCIS. No, Madam: I do not know you.

THE UNKNOWN. Yet it was at my call that you came, since there you are—at the appointed place and at the hour appointed.

FRANCIS. I do not know who called me. This morning. I was praying to God a little less languidly than usual, like a man recovering from sickness and beginning to live and love once more. Then all of a sudden I felt within myself a limitless desire of happiness—to be happy like the birds, the sun, and the trees that fling music and light and scent to one another round me. And I also felt that I was not really happy in the days when I believed I was, and that the sort of happiness I fancied was mine would now be but a hindrance to being happier still. I don't know whether I make myself clear, Madam: perhaps I am too—academic. But I was a student before I dreamed of knighthood, and . . .

THE UNKNOWN. I am listening, Francis.

FRANCIS. Well, since you are so kind, I will continue. Since then for the knight there can be no joy more per-



fect than to serve his Lady, I made bold to ask God, who was listening to me, to make me meet the noblest, purest, loveliest lady in all the world—and also the richest; for nobility, purity and beauty deserve supremest honour—nothing is too splendid for such an one. A silly dream—a presumptuous dream; a madman's dream, and you must forgive me. But the unworthier I felt myself, the more this hunger for happiness rose strong within me, from heart to eyes and lips, till I might absorb into myself the thing that I felt was promised me.—Ah, shame, shame upon me, for demanding thus of life a perfection that is refused even to the best! But the storm of my desire was stronger than all my shame. What might a poor lad do against this passion for joy? (*Mysteriously*). Then it was that in my thought I heard as it were another thought borne I know not whence, a voice strong and sweet, but that struck my heart rather than my ear, and it said—"She whom thou seekest, seeketh thee. Before the moonrise shalt thou see her, to-night, beside the fountain." To-night! My heart seemed bursting! But I never dreamed the voice might not speak sooth. Wherefore I have spent the whole long day adorning myself in your honour, counting and urging on the minutes and the seconds. That is why I am come, my Lady, in knightly guise, unto your love and service!

THE UNKNOWN. You presumed, Francis; you presumed. Do you know that I am a Queen?

FRANCIS. The more worshipful, then, my service.

THE UNKNOWN. Do you know, Francis that Queen though I be, neither riches are mine nor beauty?

FRANCIS. Yet the voice told me that both were yours.

THE UNKNOWN. Knowest thou, Francis that in that land where I have my court, are none of the things thou lovest? Nor lutes nor violins, nor delicate wines, nor dainty food? nor pomp, nor entertainment, nor leisure, nor even rest?

FRANCIS. I knew it not ; but little enough I care !

THE UNKNOWN. Thou renouncest them ?

FRANCIS. I renounce nothing ! 'Tis thou shalt be my music, my laughter, my coronal, my feast and my repose ! I shall lack nothing.

THE UNKNOWN. Well, question my subjects. In their own despite they serve me. All the day long they curse me.

FRANCIS. Make me share their chains ! I will not curse thee.

THE UNKNOWN. How knowest thou ?

FRANCIS. I know it.

THE UNKNOWN. How ?

FRANCIS. Because I love thee.

THE UNKNOWN. But thou hast not seen me.

FRANCIS. From thy voice my heart hath learnt thee.

THE UNKNOWN. Can one love squalor and disease ?

FRANCIS. Well, somehow, then, one can . . .

THE UNKNOWN. I dwell where no love enters. If thou thoughtest to find Love within my kingdom, O Knight, go home !

FRANCIS. Love will be there, if I bring it !

THE UNKNOWN. An undivided love ?

FRANCIS. Undivided. I want no more half-measures.

THE UNKNOWN. Thou wilt not retain the least particle for any other whatsoever ?

FRANCIS. Not a flake ! not a fleck !

THE UNKNOWN. Not for thy friends ? not for thy family ? nor for thy city ? nor thy country ?

FRANCIS. Thou shalt make me forget them.

THE UNKNOWN. Not even for thyself ?

FRANCIS. I swear it.

THE UNKNOWN. Reflect on what thou sayest. For 'tis thy Self that beyond all thou lovest.

FRANCIS. I will try to hate that Self.

THE UNKNOWN. Francis, Francis ! is *this* the yearning for joy that brought thee to our appointment in this square ?



FRANCIS. Yes, yes, I recognise it, and at last know how to satisfy it. Till to-day, I have lived but for my Self. All things eluded me, since all things I was trying to draw towards my Self. In vain, to escape from Self, I knocked at every door. Doors opened—yes—but into shadowy corridors that wound ever back to Self, to my Self in its throne-room of self-sufficiency, self-satisfaction. O shame on me; and to thee, all praise! for the door thou openest to me, my Lady all unknown, is the door to the supremest joy, for it leads me forth from Self.

THE UNKNOWN. Towards whom, Francis?

FRANCIS. I care not who thou art! towards thee! towards a greater yet than thou!

THE UNKNOWN. Towards God?

FRANCIS. Ah, towards God may it be indeed, if but He have not rejected the thing that He has made. I dared not confess that such my hope was. Towards God! May God consecrate the love that I have vowed thee, Madam!

THE UNKNOWN. Indeed it is best to come by way of me if thou wouldst see Him. (*Pause*). Approach, then, Francis. If thou knowest not who I am, thou knowest whither, at least, I lead. Towards God. Job gave me welcome on his dung-hill; the Baptist, in his desert. I never left the side of God's Son, Jesus Christ. The Apostles, the Hermits, all God's vagabonds, all the Church's pioneers, acknowledge me their Queen!

FRANCIS. Then what is your name?

THE UNKNOWN. My name is Lady Poverty. (*She opens her cloak. FRANCIS shrinks back, but recovers himself*). You see my dress, Sir Francis. Part left I to the thistles, part among the rocks, part to the wind. Dust, rain, time have threaded away what yet remains upon me. My clothes are but a bundle of nameless rags that cold and heat can pierce and serve but to safeguard modesty. A rag upon my head—a scrap of

sacking round my waist—and lo my veil ; lo, my cloak. And these thorns for holding them together—and these brambles that have caught in my hair.

FRANCIS. Clothes make not the man.

THE UNKNOWN. Lift my cloak. Look at this fleshless arm ; at my wrist warped with reaching forth for alms ; these fingers hard as horn ; these nails worn even beyond the quick. Fine sir, will you take my hand ?

FRANCIS. Here is my hand. (*Pause*).

THE UNKNOWN. Now, I will lift my veil. And you shall tell me whether I please you still. Try to surmount, my lad, such self-love as still remains within thee ; for my face and that love are foes. If still thou lovest what flatters the eye, then shall thine eyes shut and thou, shrink back with horror. Look. (*She lifts her veil. Pause. FRANCIS shudders, but for a moment only*). Well, you say nothing ?

FRANCIS (*dully*). No more do I love beauty.

THE UNKNOWN. Nearer ! nearer ! My skin has thickened, and untimely has grown old. Look steadily at the grime upon it. The poor have a hard life : they bathe not when they choose. At night, they lay not aside their clothes ; the sweat grows sour upon them ; the reek of the night clings to them. Their teeth decay, and their breath is foul. You no more dare to breathe beside me.

FRANCIS. (*conquering his disgust*). I do, I do.

THE UNKNOWN. No. Never hast thou seen poor folks so near at hand. O young man over-rich. Knowest thou so much as whether the poor exist ?

FRANCIS. 'Tis that which, since a while, has hindered me from happiness.

THE UNKNOWN. Lower not your eyes—count my wrinkles, Francis. My tears have hollowed two deep channels on my cheeks. They have scorched the edges of my eyelids : they have made my lashes fall . . . And you see, here over my lip, this silver star . . .



FRANCIS. A star ? (*he trembles*).

THE UNKNOWN. Ah : leprosy. Hence comes the reek that strangles thee. Anguish of heart . . . agony of flesh . . . I am a mass of bruises and of sores. The poor man's body offers no resistance to any ill. These rags, this body, and this sickness—there is my livery, O Francis ! My servants must put it on. (*Pause*). You draw back ?

FRANCIS. No, my Lady.

THE UNKNOWN. Your heart heaves. . .

FRANCIS. With pity.

THE UNKNOWN. And no disgust ?

FRANCIS. Disgust with myself. I have loved myself too much. I have never loved anything save my Self.

THE UNKNOWN. And you would embrace the life of poverty for my sake ?

FRANCIS. For the love of you, my Lady.

THE UNKNOWN. And you would kiss the Poor ?

FRANCIS. If need were.

THE UNKNOWN. A poor one like me—marked with the mark . . . ? (*She points to her lip. He shrinks*). For the love of Christ ! (*She reaches out her arms*). Come !

FRANCIS. Alas, my Lady ! The love of Self that still is mine sets me a-tremble, from crown to heel, like a cypress when the storm is nearing. My flesh revolts against the New Man. My flesh locks itself round like a cuirass to hold Francis back, within his house of delight and of perdition. But, I implore you, help me. For the sake of these fair skies, that too much mine eyes have fondled, at dawn, at dusk, at every, every hour ; of the rose of May, whereof deep, too deep, I breathed ; of the jasmine, the honeysuckle, the long grasses . . . Of the sweet sweet fruits and the wines that never my lips forget . . . for their sakes to-day thy lips do I will to kiss. (*He advances : shrinks : then, dully—*) Let all this lovely world be taken away from me ! (*He kisses the LADY POVERTY*).

THE UNKNOWN. O Francis, dear indeed art thou to me ! Since Christ Himself, no man hath shown such gentleness unto me.

FRANCIS. (*in ecstasy*). Have I been dreaming ? For now, how beautiful you seem ! (*At the moment of their embrace, the moonlight, which was bathing the wall at their side, but left FRANCIS and the LADY POVERTY in shadow, has come gently round to where they stand, and POVERTY is suddenly seen to be of magical aspect, somewhat as Giotto has painted her in the lower church at Assisi—a woman, yet an angel, with features wasted, no doubt, yet wonderfully noble and fine, and clothed and crowned with veils that are tattered, yet delicate and silky, like great cobwebs silver and azure in the moon : the brambles and berries that are caught in her drapery make touches of green and red that form a coronet on her brow*). O Lady Poverty, who wove you this brocade, more clinging and more exquisite than any spider's web ? who jewelled it thus with coral and with emerald ? who wove for you this diadem ? O Lady Poverty, if my eyes dare to scan your form, they see therein assembled every sign of dignity, of youth, of grace. O Lady Poverty, your hand reveals your soul, your hand, ever open, ever generous, ever active ; your white foot resting on this earth tells me how light your heart is . . . O Lady Poverty, thou art the fairy of the night—thou, the Bride of the Song of songs ! How lovely on thy forehead is the royal calm of soul that shines across the flesh as if the flesh were glass—that preserves ever the flesh in white virginity, in charity, and gladness ! No, never more will I name thee "Lady Poverty," but "Lady Wisdom," for what is wisdom, but to dwell with thee ? But how canst thou give me so much, since thou hast nothing ?

THE UNKNOWN. (*She makes a sign meaning that this is a secret : and then, magnificently, says :*) My Francis, plight we now our troth !

FRANCIS. Alas, I am not worthy !



THE UNKNOWN. I shall supply thee worth. And on thy finger, see, I place this iron ring.

FRANCIS. In return, take thou this ring of gold. (*They exchange their rings*).

THE UNKNOWN. Thou promisest me fidelity ?

FRANCIS. I promise.

THE UNKNOWN. Come then to the feast of our espousal. Here let us make it, on the stone table that this fountain offers us. Here is water—we can drink it from our hands : and here is bread—dry bread—that we shall break together. (*They sit down opposite one another on the fountain-basin*).

FRANCIS : How simple this feast is. How I love it.

THE UNKNOWN. And the love of God it is that has ministered all of it.

FRANCIS. Even this bread ?

THE UNKNOWN. I picked it up by the roadside. (*They break the bread and eat it*).

FRANCIS. It is the Bread of Life !

THE UNKNOWN. Thou hast said it, Francis.

FRANCIS. Could I but share it all my life long with thee, my Lady !

THE UNKNOWN. Thou shalt, if God's grace grant it—and if men suffer thee. The end is not yet for thee, dear Francis. When thou hast overcome thyself—and daily must be that conquest—there still shall remain the world to overcome, and daily to be conquered. Now let us drink this water that God chose for the washing away our sins, and that He caused the Lance to draw forth from His side. (*She drinks from her hollowed hand and then makes him drink*). And now, up, my Knight ! Are you ready ?

FRANCIS. At your service ! (*He rises*).

THE UNKNOWN. Onward, then !

FRANCIS. I grieve to leave you.

THE UNKNOWN. You will find me everywhere. I have never failed mankind. Alas, it is men who have failed me ! (*He begins to leave her, but slowly. The*

*music, which, ever since the transfiguration of Poverty, must have enwrapped the dialogue, fades gradually. The song of a nightingale survives).*

FRANCIS (*near his father's staircase*). A nightingale!

THE UNKNOWN. Listen not! Not yet darest thou take pleasure in its song. Knowest thou still what it sang yesterday?

FRANCIS. I have forgotten.

THE UNKNOWN. No—recall it! “Glory to Francis Bernadone”!

FRANCIS (*ashamed*). I know—I know—

THE UNKNOWN. And now?

FRANCIS. I think I guess . . . But tell me . . .

THE UNKNOWN. To God the glory!

FRANCIS. To God the glory!

FRANCIS *slowly climbs the stair of Peter Bernardone, and*  
POVERTY *disappears. In the cypress-tree the*  
*nightingale trills high and higher.*



## ACT II

*A white road in front of the ancient chapel of St. Damian.*

*You can see part of the rickety porch, and part of the ruined wall that makes but a feeble fence for the garden attached. Large stones and a stone bench against the wall, over which peers a clump of twisted, dusty olive-trees.*

*A harsh afternoon sun, not yet beginning to set. Distant hubbub, as of a carnival. Popular songs. Sitting on the bench is the old priest of St. Damian, lost in his thoughts. The noise grows louder, till you can hear the words.*

STREETBOYS (*off*). The madman! the madman!—Here's the lunatic! here's the madman!—This is Francis, this is Francis!

*Shouts and laughter. A crowd of streetboys enters Right. They are dragging along one of their band, with an old ragged sack over his clothes. He is pretending to be Francis Bernardone.*

BOY. Father!

PRIEST. My boys?

BOY. Look!

PRIEST. Well?

BOY. Don't you know who it is?

PRIEST. Indeed I don't.

BOY. But you've met him! It's the madman.

BOYS. The Madman!

BOY. He's Francis! . . . Francis! . . . The madman! the lunatic.

BOY. Sing us your song, Francis!

BOYS. Sing your song!

Boy. Now all together please. And in time !  
*They surround the boy, who sits down, laughing, on one of the stones.*

Boys. Francis, Francis, back from the wars !  
 Have you done the church yet ?  
 What about your dagger ?  
 What about your sweetheart ?  
 What about your trowel ? What about your hod ?  
*They laugh.*

Boy. Francis, Francis ! what did you bring back from the French ?

"FRANCIS." A stench !

Boys. A stench. . .

Boy. Now verse two. One—two. . .

Boys. Francis, Francis, back from the wars !  
 Where have you left your armour ?  
 What about your jerkin ?  
 What about your feather ?  
 What about your jack-boots ?  
 What about your shield ?

Boy. That's not all, boys ? What else ?

Boys. Yes, yes ! And your shirt ? what about your shirt ?

"FRANCIS." I haven't got one.

Boys. He hasn't got one ! he hasn't got a shirt !  
 show your shirt !

*Uproar. They pull him about by his rags.*

PRIEST. Run along. Go and play further off.

Boy. But we are bringing Francis back. Don't you want him any more ? to build the church up new ?

PRIEST. Don't you hear what I said ?

*(Shaking his stick at them.)*

Boy. Right, right ; we'll go. Forward, march !  
 To Master Peter Bernardone's !

Boys. To Peter Bernardone's. *(Dragging their companion, they exit left, singing : "The madman, here's the madman, etc.")*

*The shouting grows dim. A young nobleman has mean-*



*while entered, richly but quietly dressed. Bernard of Quintavalle. For a while he remains Right and then moves towards the priest.*

BERNARD. Well, he'll have got himself talked about for many a long day.

PRIEST. Sir. . .

BERNARD (*bidding him sit*). I expect he's pleased. That's what he wanted, anyway.

PRIEST (*not necessarily agreeing*). And it's not all over yet.

BERNARD. What can he think of next? Will he sell himself as a slave in Tripoli? Will he be a brigand chief in Calabria? Shall I tell you in a couple of words what's the matter with him, Father? Publicity! He's bitten by the publicity-microbe. He was born a simple citizen, he was born a draper; and suddenly he turns himself into a noble lord. He upholsters himself with all the velvets in his father's shop. And next day, behold him a troubadour. And the day after, a knight! And when nobody worries any more about his motley wear, when he's flashed his armour around to his satisfaction, he hatches the notion of getting home on poverty . . . he starts a line in rags. Success standing on its head, I grant you, but success none the less. For it's not every day that a son of Peter Bernardone gets stones thrown at him. But the game won't last. When he's done with the extremes, he'll come back to the golden mean—that he should never have left—where wisdom sits enthroned. (*Pause.*) Don't you agree?

PRIEST. I would have agreed once. I did, for a long long time. I don't know whether I'm turning silly myself . . . but I begin to wonder whether true wisdom isn't an extreme itself, just like madness. At the opposite extreme, of course: still, admitting some—exaggeration. Here have I been vegetating as best I can in my chapel—for thirty years, very nearly. Sunday by Sunday I preach sermons of suitable length—and even that's too much for my flock, and each year

there are fewer left for me to bore. I resign myself to seeing the stones fall one by one and the oil running dry in the lamp, and the Faith going torpid in men's hearts—oh, in my own as well. "Mustn't ask too much. Don't tug at the string too hard. . . ." Wisdom if you will—the wisdom of Good-night! Still, to get your fish in, you've got to use a little energy . . . you must make up your mind to that. But nobody dares pull the line in, nowadays. So we catch nothing. Of course, I'm too old to change my way of acting. But I'm sure I'm wrong and mistaken, and I'm at peace no more.

BERNARD. I don't follow you. You aren't taking Francis Bernardone seriously, are you?

PRIEST. Well, one must.

BERNARD. You think he's sane?

PRIEST. Sane with a sanity that staggers us—for 'tis we are the fools.

BERNARD. But do you approve of his way of going on? You don't think it the last word in indiscretion?

PRIEST. He is doing something for the God he loves—and we, we, we're doing nothing. Nothing. There!

BERNARD. But what is it that he is doing?

PRIEST. Sir, when he came here, he was a stranger to me. I knew nothing about him. He never even told me his name. He used to come to my poor chapel in the morning, and never leave it before nightfall. First I thought he was a thief—then I thought he was mad. But I have nothing to steal, and no madman prays as I have heard him pray—on his knees—twelve hours on end. I used to come and go, move about, cough, blow my nose, upset a bench—but there he stayed, before the altar, his arms stretched out in a cross, his eyes rivetted to the image of our Master . . . you would have said that the crucifix was rivetting his eyes to itself—was holding up his arms. And often he prayed aloud, saying such beautiful things that they got into your heart and never would come forth more.



“O great and splendid God, my Lord, Jesus Christ ! I pray Thee, give me light : set fleeing the night of my soul. Grant to me a faith sincere, a hope ever firm, a perfect charity. Give me, Lord, so to know Thee that I may be enabled to act ever and in all things in the clear radiance of Thy light, and in keeping with Thy holy will. Speak, Lord, for Thy servant listeneth.” Isn’t that beautiful ? And I assure you that the silence that then fell was still more full of beauty, for one felt that God was answering him, though one heard no words. I prayed as well as I could—without going too near—right down by the door—yes, I couldn’t help praying, though I was not good at it : and since I seemed to gain nothing by it, I used to go away . . . . Now one day—I was on this bench, in the sun, like to-day, my lord Bernard, and I had left the door open. And I felt a silence weighing down upon me, a heavy, heavy silence, a black silence, as before thunder, when the birds are hushed and no leaf so much as quivers any more. Yet the storm would not burst—I was waiting for it—hoping for it . . not as a danger, but, ah, as a deliverance, to deliver me from that silence that weighed ever more heavily upon me. Then I heard the voice of Francis, and instantly—oh what relief all through my soul ! He was crying out at the top of his voice, with a kind of holy laughter in his voice. “With joy, Lord,” he was saying. “With joy will I do Thy bidding !” Oh, you know how headlong he is—I had not even had time to stand up, but there he was before me, bowing to me, kissing my hand, kneeling at my feet, and taking a ducat from his purse and begging me to buy a stock of oil, so that, said he, “the sanctuary lamp might remain ever alight before the image of Jesus Christ our Lord.” He went off running, and must have gone home to his father’s to take the cloth he sold at Foligno, and brought me back the money to restore my little chapel with. You know what happened then : how furious his father was : how he

took the money back, and put his son in prison, and hauled him off before the bishop's court . . .

BERNARD (*laughing*). And how Francis renounced his father, and stripped, and gave him back his clothes

PRIEST. Don't laugh. Don't judge him yet. These are things that neither you nor I can understand.

BERNARD. No one in his senses can understand them, that I grant.

PRIEST. No one of common sense . . . No ; they are things that no man could do alone. But since a man has done them, some one else must have been involved in it . . . He who spoke to Francis in this chapel ? Who knows ?

BERNARD. You think that ?

PRIEST. Ah, well !

BERNARD. And this—Someone—is to have said to him : Rob your father ? strip naked in the public square ? renounce your father ?

PRIEST. That merely happened next. His father could quite well have avoided it. The voice from the Crucifix, the voice that spoke in that silence that I still feel weighing on me, said to Francis Bernardone, so he told me : " Go ! rebuild My house ! for My house is like to fall in ruins." (*He points to the chapel*). And true enough.

BERNARD (*sarcastically*). And has he built it ?

PRIEST (*uncomfortably*). He went off without seeing me again. Or wait ! wait ! he has left me one little spark . . . Look, down in the dark—a tiny flame that flickers, as I do, and that watches, better than I do, before the crucifix. That is my hope—that is my trust. And so long as it shines, the old priest of St. Damian will force himself to believe in the promise the young man made him, whom God sent. (*Recapturing himself*). Silly old priest ! he oughtn't to have told you all that. You will think him an old fool. They will come and laugh at him—throw stones at him—



laugh in his face. There has been such a to-do round this poor little place that used to be so quiet. Yes—Francis will come back—I hope he may come back—but when I am dead . . . I ought to correct myself, change my way of living, rebuke myself—and the world . . . No, no, when I am dead.

BERNARD (*rising*). I promise you I won't tell any-one. (*Pointing to the church*). Might I see the image you have told me of?

PRIEST. I will take you. (*Rises*). Alas, a very poor little image!

BERNARD. I'd rather go alone.

PRIEST. As you like.

BERNARD *enters the chapel*. The old PRIEST *sits down again. After a while, shouting, as before, but coming from the left. The PRIEST listens and shrugs his shoulders.*


BOYS (*off*). The madman, the madman. Here's the lunatic!

The shouting grows nearer, and louder, deeper. One would judge that grown men and women were now along with the boys. The priest raises his head, gets nervous, and looks. In the midst of the yelling mob, enter FRANCIS, in hermit's dress. A nondescript-coloured tunic, a rope round his waist, sandals, with a beard short but unkempt. He has a huge sack on his shoulders. A poor old man, Albert, follows him: he also carries a sack, and has a wallet slung across him: on his arm is a bucket, and he shoulders the assailants to one side. When FRANCIS thinks he is going to use his stick, he stops him. He puts his sack down by the wall. The PRIEST stands up. Master PETER BERNARDONE pushes through the crowd, to take Francis aside.

FRANCIS. God give you peace!

PETER. What have you come to do here too, you bad son?

FRANCIS. My father's will.



PETER. I'm your father.

FRANCIS. How can you be ? You cursed your son.

PETER. And I curse him again.

FRANCIS. Once was quite enough, father. (*To the crowd : indicating old ALBERT*). Look, please, at this man. I found him in the public square. He's a real poor man. I used to give him alms—oh, when I was quite a little boy. He hasn't forgotten it. As for me, I am only a beginner—I need a master—(*prostrating himself at ALBERT's feet*). Father, bless me.

(*Derisive shouts from the crowd*).

FRANCIS. (*rising*). There is a wonder for you ! God gives me a father who blesses me to replace the—other one.

PETER *makes for him. They hold him back.*

CROWD. Leave him alone. He's mad.

PETER. Curse you then, for the third time !

FRANCIS. God forgive you. The father that God has given me will bless me again to compensate . . Go in peace.

CROWD. Come away, Master Peter . . come with us

*A few friends lead PETER off. FRANCIS goes towards the old PRIEST, and speaks gently.*

FRANCIS. Here I am. Do you recognise me ? And you aren't going to disown me, are you ? As God's minister, bless me in your turn. You only half hoped to see me back. You half doubted the Omnipotence of God. Have no anxiety. The Almighty will do what He likes with us. Our Lord the Bishop encourages my mission ; so here I am, an obedient son, as I promised, to rebuild God's House. But I assure you, here and now, despite your doubts, your hesitations, despite the annoyance you may be entertaining within you because of the nuisance Francis has been to you, that whatever you do, for him or against him, Francis will always preserve for you as for all the Church's ministers, that reverence that is due to the hands that



lift the Sacred Host, and the lips that pronounce the words of consecration.

PRIEST (*blessing him*). But I love you, my boy.

FRANCIS. Before beginning my task, let me salute the Master of my toil. Excuse me . . .

*He reverently enters the chapel.* BERNARD OF QUINTA-VALLE, *who had come out a moment or two before, bows as he passes.* FRANCIS *bows in return and soon you can just see him, in the dark, kneeling with his arms stretched out in the shape of a cross.*

BOYS. The madman ! The madman !

VOICES. Hush. Hush.

A WOMAN. This isn't the time for that. Francis is praying . . .

CROWD (*approvingly*). Yes, yes. It isn't proper . . . *The BOYS keep quiet. Groups are formed.* BERNARD *and the old PRIEST (Right), keep their eyes fixed on FRANCIS. At back, the boys and the women surround old ALBERT, who has sat down on FRANCIS's sack. (Left), a few workingmen and tradesmen are arguing.*

FIRST WORKMAN. I don't agree.

SECOND WORKMAN. I'm sorry.

FIRST WORKMAN. If he was not a madman, he would be a saint. But he's not a saint ; so he's mad.

SECOND WORKMAN. How do you know he's not a saint ?

FIRST WORKMAN. How do you know he's not mad ?

SECOND WORKMAN. A madman doesn't pray so long.

FIRST WORKMAN. A saint doesn't make an exhibition of himself.

SECOND WORKMAN. I grant that.

FIRST WORKMAN. But what about a madman pretending to be a saint ?

SECOND WORKMAN. But what about a saint pretending to be mad ?

VOICES. Impossible . . . out of the question.

THIRD WORKMAN. But suppose he's neither the one nor the other ?

FIRST WORKMAN. Neither mad nor a saint ?

SECOND WORKMAN. Neither mad nor a saint ?

THIRD WORKMAN. And that he's simply making fools of us ?

FIRST WORKMAN. That's what we all thought.

SECOND WORKMAN. But we aren't so sure now.

THIRD WORKMAN. But he must be something !

FIRST WORKMAN. What I can't understand is his apparently liking what he's doing.

SECOND WORKMAN. How do you know he likes it ?

THIRD WORKMAN. Well, why should he do it ?

FIRST WORKMAN. Why should he do it ?

VOICES. Why should he do it ?

THIRD WORKMAN. Come on. Own up. There's no explanation. If silly fools didn't attend to him, he'd soon go home.

VOICES. Of course. Of course.

FIRST WORKMAN. Well then, let's be off !

THIRD WORKMAN. In a minute. I want to see what he's going to do.

FIRST WORKMAN. So do I.

SECOND WORKMAN. So do I.

FIRST WORKMAN. He's got something or other in his head . . . . .

THIRD WORKMAN. Most certainly. Hush. Here he comes. (*FRANCIS comes out of the chapel. The crowd draws back and makes a ring.*)

FRANCIS. May God bless our work. (*To ALBERT*). Open your sack. I am going to open mine.

ALBERT *takes out of his sack a mason's mixing-board and a trowel. FRANCIS, from his, three white stones. He puts two of them at the foot of the wall and keeps the third in his hands.*

FRANCIS. Who will help Francis, meanest of masons, to rebuild the House of God ?

BOY. Not I ! (*They laugh*).

BOYS. Not I !

FRANCIS. Don't be too sure ! Meanwhile, I'll do it



by myself. (*To ALBERT*) Give me your pail, my son.

SECOND WORKMAN (*To the boys*) Come on ! Go and get him some water.

BOYS (*fighting for the pail*). Give it here—give it to me !

FRANCIS. You see ? (*he laughs*) Already I've got company. (*Boys exeunt with pail*). (*To ALBERT*). Have you got the mortar ?

ALBERT *takes off the wallet he had round his shoulders.*

FRANCIS *puts the stone in position, kneels down, and spreads some mortar on the mixing-board. They look on, and talk. A boy comes back with the pail and as he puts it down splashes FRANCIS.*

BOY. It's heavy.

FRANCIS. God will be the more grateful. (*He pours water on the board*). O thou my Sister Water, of all unhonoured elements whereof the world is made, not the least precious art thou, that hast for privilege the slaking all things' thirst, or mirroring the heaven's blue, of taking up into thee the power of baptising, of merging thyself into the wine within the chalice, and of sealing the stones of the Church of God. (*He mingles the mortar with his trowel*).

*The Boys laugh at him.*

MASON. You don't know how to set about it.

FRANCIS. Then show me, brother.

MASON. By all means. But how much will you give me ?

FRANCIS. God will pay you.

MASON. Oh thank you !

FRANCIS. If you refuse God's wages you never will be rich. (*Laughter. On his knees, he continues to mix the mortar*).

SECOND WORKMAN. Aha ! In another minute he'd have had you working too.

THIRD WORKMAN. Oh, he's clever !

SECOND WORKMAN. He certainly is.

FIRST WORKMAN. Devilish clever.

THIRD WORKMAN. Clever as the devil.

FRANCIS (*without stopping working*). Our Lord tells the children of light to show themselves cleverer still than he.

FIRST WORKMAN. He has an answer for everything.

SECOND WORKMAN. Not a word escapes him.

SECOND WORKMAN. Nor a thought, even. Be on your guard.

Enter another CITIZEN. *A small, diffident man. The chronicler calls him "a simple pious man." He goes towards the chapel, halts and asks :*

SIMPLE MAN. What's going on ?

FIRST WORKMAN. Francis is rebuilding the chapel of St. Damian.

VOICES. St. Damian. (*They laugh*).

FRANCIS. Of St. Damian. Yes, brother. He was a great doctor, in his time, and cured bodies and souls. And now that things are worse than they were in his days, and everyone is ill, it is most important to ensure his having a room, well walled and well roofed, where he can operate under cover.

SIMPLE MAN. So now he has turned mason ?

FIRST WORKMAN. And wants us to help him.

FRANCIS. Not for my own sake—but to go faster. And to make everyone share in the merits that most certainly are attached to this work. (*He rises and carries the board to the bench. Then he comes back to fetch the three stones, one after the other*). One—two—three. (*He gets on to the bench and spreads the mortar on the gap in the wall*).

SIMPLE MAN. And is that all ?

FIRST WORKMAN. Yes. . .

SIMPLE MAN. I don't follow. Does he propose to rebuild the chapel with three stones ?

FRANCIS (*still at work*). Yes, brother.

FIRST WORKMAN. There you are !

OTHERS. Three stones ?



THIRD WORKMAN. He takes it all for granted !

FRANCIS. I take it for granted that others, in course of time, will come and lend a hand. This is just a beginning. We will cope with the worst need first. This cornice, at the angle, needs support. Here is the place that awaits them. (*Henceforward a grave and heavenly music accompanies his work. He takes up the first stone*). O Stone, my sister, that shalt uphold the rest, I bless thee. Thou shalt be Faith, which lacking, Hope cannot be. And thou shalt also be the symbol of the Father who, from Eternity, begat the Son. (*He lays the stone respectfully, covers it with mortar, and then takes up the second*). O Stone, my sister, in like manner bless I thee. Thou shalt stand for Hope, that rests on Faith, and upholds Charity. And I may liken thee to the Son, who is King in the bosom of the Father. (*He lays it respectfully, covers it with mortar, and picks up the third*). O sister Stone, thee too do I bless. For thou in thy turn art surely Charity, that Faith and Hope carry even up to Heaven. And thou shalt hold the place of the Spirit, whose Love bears equally upon the Father and the Son, and by its very impress doth unite them. (*He reverently seals the three stones with a single sweep of the trowel. Then, slowly—*) Firm-founded upon Faith, and Hope and Charity, and on the Blessed Trinity, God's House cannot but endure, and increase. In the Name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. (*He makes the sign of the cross on the stones with his trowel. The music ceases. Pause. People pull themselves together, look at one another, and laugh*).

CROWD. Hurrah ! Bravo ! Carry on ! Carry on, Francis. Well ? What next ? Is that all ? (*He gets off his bench. Confused remarks*).

FIRST WORKMAN. And that's that.

SECOND WORKMAN. That's that.

THIRD WORKMAN. He's finished his day's work.

MASON. Lucky devil.

FIRST WORKMAN. Father, you've been nobly served.  
*The Boys laugh.*

FRANCIS. Brothers, wait a minute. I am now going to beg.

FIRST WORKMAN. That's his other little craze.  
*Laughter.* FRANCIS *take's old ALBERT'S hod and kneels down in the road.*

FRANCIS. Pray, sirs—for the rebuilding of the House of God (*twice*). Whoso shall give me the alms of one stone, shall receive a recompense in heaven. Whoso shall make me the alms of two stones, shall receive two rewards. (*They begin to laugh*). Whoso shall give me the alms of three stones, shall receive three rewards. (*The laughter breaks out freely. The Boys pick it up, all together*).

Boys. Whoso shall make me the alms of four stones, shall receive four rewards . . . Whoso shall make me the alms of five stones, etc. . . Of six stones, etc. Seven . . . . Eight. . . .

*A regular riot. They surround FRANCIS and hustle him.*

Boy. Here ! here . . . (*He picks up some pebbles and the others do so too*). Here ! (*He, and then the rest, toss them into the hod*).

FRANCIS. Pray, sirs, for the rebuilding of the House of God.

Boys: Hi ! Catch !

BERNARD. Get out. Let him alone.

FIRST WORKMAN. Yes . . . certainly . . .

SECOND WORKMAN. Yes . . . certainly . . .

THIRD WORKMAN. Yes . . . certainly . . . .

FRANCIS. Oh, don't be rough to anyone, please. (*He stands up*). I quite understand ! One gets nothing for nothing. I promise you things that don't belong to me—things in the air—things in the sky—in return for solid things like stones. It's my duty to pay for my stones. It's a duty. I shall improvise a song for you, as I used to. One of my troubadour songs, that you used to like.



CROWD. What? He's going to sing? Bravo! Cheers!

FRANCIS. If you like this one, you must pay me as I like.

BOYS. Sing up, Francis!

FIRST WORKMAN. People are waking up again!

BERNARD. Are you really going on to make an exhibition of yourself?

FRANCIS. It's all I know how to.

SECOND WORKMAN. He's a fine actor.

THIRD WORKMAN. Didn't I tell you so?

BOYS. Sing up, Francis!

VOICES. Hush!

*He gets on to the bench. They make a ring round him.*

*Deep silence.*

FRANCIS. I have nothing to play on. You must imagine the music.

*He picks up two sticks to represent violin and bow, and draws one across the other. They laugh. The boys cheer.*

FRANCIS. The Song of the King's Son!

VOICES. Hush!

*The poem is recited, but its rhythm is supported by a mysterious music on stringed instruments.*

FRANCIS. I am a King's son—a king's son—the mightiest king in the world.

At my birth He gave me a palace, a palace of air and light, a palace of woods and hills.

A palace wide-carpeted with plains, with plains whereof the fairest is the plain of Umbria.

And there from my birth played I, as befitted my royal sonship. (*Gentle applause*).

I am a King's son—a king's son—the mightiest king in the world

And my Father dwelt in a palace a thousandfold more fair than mine.

And He sent word to me that He would come and visit me, and He said, Prepare a House for Me . .

I am a King's son—a king's son—the mightiest king in the world.

But the House that must receive my Father, had no doors ;

It had no windows ; its rafters were decayed, its roof was leaking, and its walls were tottering.

Yet the King said to me : “ None the less will I come, so do I hunger and thirst to see thee, since with so great a love I love thee ! ”

I am a King's son, a king's son—the mightiest king in the world

And I gave shelter to the King my Father as a beggar and a vagabond have shelter.

But, so long as He shall sleep in cold, in filthiness, in shame—

So long as I shall not have set upright His worthy home—

I am a King's son—a king's son—the mightiest king in the world.

I too will sleep on earth, I too with Him will beg along the roads . . .

I will refuse all joyance in my palace of the air, of the light, of the forests and the hills, that on my birth's day He gave to me for mine,

And in that fair carpeting of plains whereof the fairest is the plain of Umbria,

And whereon I have disported me since my birth's day, as befitted my royal sonship.

I am a king's son ! a king's son !

*A clean-cut chord marks the end of the song.*

CROWD. Bravo ! bravo ! I am a king's son, a king's son.

*Laughter, in which FRANCIS joins.*

FRANCIS (*familiarly*). I am a king's son . . . but so are you. Now help me to rebuild the House. (*He comes down, holding out his hand. They move restlessly.*)



CROWD. What ! again ? No, no !

FRANCIS. For our Father's House, please . . Just one stone—or two stones—or three . .

CROWD. No, no.

BOYS (*picking up pebbles*). Here—wait a minute . .

SIMPLE MAN. Excuse me. I want to say a word. (*Voices. Then silence*). You don't know me. I haven't been in this town not above one month. I managed to pick up a lodging cheap—cheap but bad. (*They laugh*). That's as good as telling you that I haven't got much : better tell the truth and say right out I ain't got nothing. The house I live in don't belong to me : so I can't take no stones out of it. I've got a small job, but it don't bring me in not more than what's wanted to keep me alive ; so I can't buy none. Still I'd like to give something. If I was a stone meself, why, I'd give meself and welcome. I've got a hard enough head-piece after all. (*He thumps his head*). But, I ain't no stone. (*Voices : a burst of laughter. FRANCIS comes forward and embraces him*).

FRANCIS. Brother, brother—yes ! yes ! What you said is exactly right. You're no stone, say you ? But what about the stone of your good will ? the stone of your immortal soul ? the stone of your immortal soul and good will ? (*To the crowd*) Brothers, I've not finished ! Listen to me. We're all of us stones . . .

CROWD. Stones ? what's he talking about. Stop talking !

FRANCIS (*getting on to the mile-stone*). Listen ! I'm going to sing again.

VOICES. Bravo ! Listen to Francis !

*Silence. The music begins again, with a flight of arpeggi now of wider sweep, bolder and more pure.*

I'm a king's son—a king's son ! I have rebuilt my Father's House . .

With solid walls, with pillars firm, with wide wide doors,  
and with a tower so stalwart and so bold that it  
touches heaven's clouds.

The tower was tall but as the olive : now it out-soars  
the oak tree ; and, higher than eagle's flight, I  
have hung its bells of gold.

To ring at dawn, at noon, at night, on feasts and on the  
Sundays of the mightiest of kings, my Father.

But my Father said to me : Not yet is this house fit for  
Me.

I am a king's son, a king's son, the mightiest king in the  
world.

But my Father said to me : I want a House fit for my  
Fatherhood : for albeit I am King, Father too am  
I, and Father more than king.

I want a House that lives, a house that lasts, a house  
that loves—for I am Life, I last, and I am Love !

I want a House in the bodies of My sons, a house that at  
the end shall be re-born from out their dust.

I want a house in My sons' souls that never shall see  
death ;

I want a house in My son's love, love that links flesh  
with soul—

A house of love, a house of prayer, pure and crystal-clear.

I am a king's son, a king's son. And to rebuild my  
Father's house

I call to-day on all my brothers, king's sons too, I now  
do call to all men, all, that are all, all, His sons,  
King's sons . .

And to them I cry, " Come ! give yourselves—place  
yourselves aright, in that Order that is Peace, and  
that our Father, God, hath pre-ordained.

The first to come shall have the noble privilege of carry-  
ing on them all the whole house.

Embedded in the soil, poor, chaste, hidden, be ye the  
bedrock and the foundation ! be the first layer of  
its stones !

You that come later, you will have to live in daylight . .  
In this great Light of God, of God, your Father, the  
world's most mighty king !



He who set His Son Jesus to lie in that earth's-hollow  
 wherein you too shall sleep,  
 For you shall have for lover and beloved in your holy  
 destitution, the Sacred Corner-Stone, God's Well-  
 Beloved Son . .

And on the Day of Awakening and Reward, God's  
 earthly house, uprooted by the lightning of the  
 Judgment, shall soar high, from the devastated  
 world,

And you, welded together, by love, with Jesus  
 Christ, you shall upbear it, like a treasury of  
 praise, to the throne of that Father and that  
 King—Amen ! ”

*At this moment of ecstasy, the music stops abruptly. A  
 pause of astonishment and admiration. Francis  
 adds, with simplicity :*

The first stone is Christ ; the second was St. Peter ;  
 now we must find the rest. We will go to the  
 world's end to look for them. Who will be a stone,  
 a little, humble stone, in the eternal house of God ?  
*The crowd whispers, heaves, laughs harshly, and begins  
 to scatter.*

VOICES. Who will be a stone ? Who will be a stone ?  
 Not I ! Nor I ! . .

You go ! Go yourself !

MASON. Old Albert !

CROWD. Old Albert !

BOY. His reverence !

CROWD. His reverence !

THIRD WORKMAN. And what must one do to be a  
 stone, please ?

FRANCIS. Keep in your proper place.

MASON. You're a good example of that, aren't you ?

FRANCIS. The place of God's stones is in humility,  
 poverty, and chastity.

CROWD. Oh thank you, thank you !

FRANCIS. And in the love of God and of one's neighbour.

CROWD. That's enough.

SIMPLE MAN (*falling on his knees*). Pick me up, if you please, my Father . . . I'm not much of a stone . . . but to stop a gap . . . Put me where you like. (*Shouts of laughter*).

FRANCIS. In the mud ?

SIMPLE MAN. In the mud.

FRANCIS. In the cold ?

SIMPLE MAN. In the cold. The house must be put up again.

FRANCIS. Indeed it must, for the love of God. And I lift up the stone of God. (*He takes him in his arms and lifts him up*).

*The crowd laughs, shouting : " Let's be off," etc.*

FIRST WORKMAN. We're wasting our time.

SECOND WORKMAN. We're forgetting our business.

THIRD WORKMAN. Ah yes—business ! business.

BOYS. The madman ! the madman !

FIRST WORKMAN. Let him alone. The comedy's played out.

CROWD (*Moving off*). Good-night, Francis !

BOY. You ought to say, Goodnight, Stone !

CROWD. Good-night, Stone . . . . (*Exit Left*).

FIRST WORKMAN (*as he leaves*). If that's a saint, it's not the sort of saint I like.

SECOND WORKMAN. If that's a fool, he is rather the sort of fool I like.

THIRD WORKMAN. Well, there's worse.

SECOND WORKMAN. But one wearies of it.

FIRST WORKMAN. Yes, one gets tired of it.

THIRD WORKMAN. Yes, one gets tired of it.

THIRD WORKMAN. If he's a buffoon, you must agree he's clever at it.

FIRST WORKMAN. Oh, he's a genius.

SECOND WORKMAN. Let's go home.

*The whole crowd has melted away. There remain before the chapel only old ALBERT, squatting down, the PRIEST sitting on the bench, the SIMPLE MAN still*



*in the arms of FRANCIS, and BERNARD OF QUIN-TAVALLE, standing Right.*

FRANCIS. Here are the dear God's stones. (*Pointing to Albert*). That one, whether it guesses it or no, whether it likes it or no, has long been loyal to its place. (*Pointing to the PRIEST*). That one, that has been consecrated, has but to stay where God has placed it.

PRIEST. It is unworthy to support anything.

FRANCIS. God alone knows that. (*Pointing to the SIMPLE MAN*). And this stone, that I hold in my arms, the first stone I have collected, has long been preparing itself for its part. A stone such as I love; a lesser stone, devoted to obscurity. All the brighter shall it shine. (*Pointing to the motionless BERNARD*). And don't I see another there? (*Pause*). A very well-shaped, polished one. Perhaps we shall disgrace it. Appearances prove nothing. (*Pause*). There it is, waiting. It is waiting for the Lord Orpheus, of whom the old tale tells us, who could move, by his song, the very stones. (*Pause. To the SIMPLE MAN*) My little brother, let us go and thank God in his house. (*They move towards the chapel. FRANCIS bows to BERNARD*). Good-night, my lord Bernard.

BERNARD. Father—excuse me . . .

FRANCIS. Speak, my son :

BERNARD. I don't think I possess, as yet, the qualities of a stone—solidity, humility, . . . But I want you to know that I understood the song of the King's Son. Yes . . . you are a King's son. Will you do me the honour—the very great honour—of sleeping under my roof to-night?

FRANCIS. In a bed?

BERNARD. The best bed. At my side. In my room.

FRANCIS. Aren't you afraid they may laugh at you?

BERNARD. I hope they will laugh at me.

FRANCIS. And when you are in bed, weighed down by sleep, forgetful of all human thoughts—like a true

stone at last—aren't you afraid that I shall pick you up, too, at night ?

BERNARD. As God shall please.

FRANCIS. Then come, thou too, to thank the Lord—one can thank Him by anticipation—in that place where He has bidden me rebuild His house.

*He enters the chapel. The SIMPLE MAN follows him, then the old PRIEST, then the old mendicant, then, last of all, BERNARD. As they walk, a liturgical music, grave yet energetic, like the motif that supported the Song of the King's Son, keeps pace with them.*



### ACT III

*A pleasant valley some miles from Assisi. Clumps of trees : a village campanile in the distance.*

BR. LEO and BR. JUNIPER are seated *Left* on a slope. *Right*, reading upright against a tree, BR. MASSEO. *Back*, FRANCIS, pacing to and fro in meditation. The village bells are ringing as for some festival. Swallows wheeling round. A symphony of morning. Enter Two PEASANTS, one very old, one quite young. They enter cautiously, in front of the tree where MASSEO is leaning.

OLD PEASANT. Look—but don't go too far. Quite right to make use of them—but don't commit yourself. One never knows where it mayn't lead. With a man like him . .

YOUNG PEASANT. Which is he ?

OLD PEASANT. I don't know.

YOUNG PEASANT. Well—one might ask.

OLD PEASANT. Don't go—don't go. Listen to what they are saying.

YOUNG PEASANT. They aren't saying a word—not a syllable.

OLD PEASANT. Ah. They think before they speak.

YOUNG PEASANT. Hush ! (*they keep quiet to listen*).

LEO. It must make our Father very happy to come back to his native home and find all the bells ringing. God's good bells ! When he left they treated him as mad, and he only just escaped having stones thrown at him when he got away, And now he can't so much as get in sight of a steeple, without the bells beginning to dance and stirring up all the populace—they come out to meet our good Father with boughs and flowers.

JUNIPER. We shan't have to do much begging. We shall have more pudding than we can eat.

LEO. You're always thinking about eating.

JUNIPER. Food is my job. If Martha didn't feed Mary, Mary wouldn't have much strength for praying.

LEO. True. I beg your pardon, brother Juniper. (*Pause*). JUNIPER *laughs*.

LEO. You laugh all on your own?

JUNIPER. Sometimes. (*He laughs again*).

LEO. That's uncharitable!

JUNIPER. You're right. One ought to go shares in one's laughter too.

LEO. Well, let's go shares. What are you laughing at?

JUNIPER. I'll tell you. But perhaps it won't make you laugh. I often laugh at things that don't make other people laugh.

LEO. Even so, I'd laugh, just to be laughing along with you.

JUNIPER. Well, then, this is it. I'm thinking of what happened when those inquisitive folks thought I would tell them something . . . remarkable. They hadn't come to be converted. They came to see . . . and the proof is, the fine silk dresses of the ladies. I'm not the bear-leader . . .

LEO. Nor even the bear.

JUNIPER. I pretended not to notice the crowd. But I saw two boys who were playing see-saw not far off, on a plank . . . then, then . . . (*he laughs*).

LEO. Well?

JUNIPER. Then I made them both get on one end and I got on the other myself. And we played see-saw for a good half-hour. The lookers-on were tired before we were. I got this at least from it, that they thought me perfectly mad. And so I am (*he laughs*).

LEO. Good . . . good . . . it deserves a good laugh. I hope they learnt the lesson of the see-saw.

JUNIPER (*surprised*). What was it, Brother Leo?



LEO. You know as well as I do. He who exalts himself shall be made low, he who makes himself low . . . JUNIPER *laughs. The PEASANTS, who were listening, have come gradually closer, and laugh too.*

OLD PEASANT. That's a good lesson !

YOUNG PEASANT. And one that can make you laugh.

JUNIPER. And even laugh much more than I thought myself. He who exalts himself . . . .

LEO. Now that you've had your laugh, what do you want ? (*to the PEASANTS*).

OLD PEASANT. We want—but then we don't exactly want . . . We come from the village.

YOUNG PEASANT. To see the Saint.

OLD PEASANT. Hold your tongue. Yes, it's true. To see the Saint. But from a certain distance. You must understand that we don't come to "have a little talk with him." We're Christians—good Christians—and we don't want to become any better.

LEO. Congratulations, my dear sirs ! I wish I could say the same of myself. Well ?

OLD PEASANT. You aren't the Saint ?

LEO. Great heavens, No !

OLD PEASANT. Nor you, I'm sure ?

JUNIPER. Still less me.

LEO. That's impossible.

OLD PEASANT. Couldn't you show him to us ? from a distance ?

LEO. From a distance, if you prefer. But near or far, he'll be able to catch you, my brothers.

OLD PEASANT. I'm off.

YOUNG PEASANT (*holding him*). I'm stopping.

OLD PEASANT. Stand in front of me. (*He hides behind him. Pointing to MASSEO—*) That wouldn't be him, just there, by that tree ? He frightens me.

LEO. No.

OLD PEASANT. So much the better.

LEO. The one that's walking up and down over there.

OLD PEASANT. Hush ! (*But BROTHER JOHN has come down left, and seeing FRANCIS walking up and down, imitates him, from a distance, in all that he does*). Which?

LEO. How do you mean, Which ? The one that's lifting up his arms.

OLD PEASANT. But they both are.

LEO. The one who's clasping his hands.

OLD PEASANT. But so they both are.

LEO. The one that's taking his hood off.

OLD PEASANT. But they're both taking it off.

LEO. And now he's putting it on again.

OLD PEASANT. But it's just the same. (*To the YOUNG PEASANT*) Look, but look, my lad. I see two saints . . yet I've not gone dithery—

YOUNG PEASANT. I see two saints too.

OLD PEASANT. Is there one saint twice over ?

LEO. (*sees BROTHER JOHN*). Ah—it's Brother John !

JUNIPER. Brother John !

OLD PEASANT. But which is Brother John ?

LEO. The tougher of the two.

OLD PEASANT. But which is the Saint ?

JUNIPER. The other—the one who's just knelt down.

OLD PEASANT. But the other's kneeling too . .

LEO. The one who knelt down first.

OLD PEASANT. But why does the other do all he did ?

JUNIPER. To be sure of doing what's right. He acts like that all day long, ever since our blessed Father converted him with the broom.

OLD PEASANT. With the broom ? by whacking him ? Aha, he takes strong measures. Better be off, my boy.

LEO. Cheer up. He has lots of little ways of hooking people. But as for whacks—the only person he whacks is himself. Our Father Francis was sweeping out a church. He hates to see the House of God in bad condition.

OLD PEASANT. And quite right too.

LEO. Brother John saw him. He left his oxen at the door, and took the broom from him. Next day, he



gave him his oxen—and himself. The broom had converted him.

OLD PEASANT. Oh . . oh . . well, but after all a broom—a broom.

LEO. That was how he took the lot of us.

OLD PEASANT. With a broom?

LEO. Or with something of the sort. Brother Juniper, by cooking. I was a parish priest before I followed him. He took me, by bringing me what he called his sins.

OLD PEASANT. Well I wouldn't trust him. If he catches the priests too, I'm off. I'm quite good enough.

YOUNG PEASANT. He's coming. He's coming here.

OLD PEASANT. All the more reason for going. Let's give him a cheer and be off.

OLD AND YOUNG PEASANT. Long live the Saint !  
*Exeunt. The bells ring louder. FRANCIS comes down forward, with BROTHER JOHN behind him.*

MASSEO (*shuts his book*). Why for you? why you?

FRANCIS. Yes indeed, Brother Masseo—why for me? why these shouts for me? these bells for me? why not for you, Brother, or for Brother Leo? For Brother Juniper, or Brother John, who imitates my every gesture and in consequence is worth just as much as I? “Why you, Francis?” Yes, Masseo, I can read your thoughts! “Why for you, Francis, who are not good to look at—not a man of learning—not noble? Why does all the world run after you? want to see you, listen to you, obey you?” Now I will tell you why. You will be as glad as I am. Because of the piercing eye of God, because of His holy eyes, that went looking through the world, and found even among sinners no worse, or viler, or more wretched sinner than I am. And so me among all did He choose, to confound greatness, strength, the beauty and the wisdom of the world, and to prove to us the more conclusively that from Him it all comes. (*Pause*). And also, Brother Masseo, most certainly, because Brother Ass lives ever

within me, not well enough shod yet, and saddled, and bridled, and because he might wax vain in the rays of this glory that only my demerit sanctions—therefore do I wish to return to my first plan, to bury myself in some rocky cave like Brother Silvester and like Brother Bernard, and I have decided to preach no more, so as no more to risk yielding to a temptation of vain glory. But since I have lost all confidence in my own judgment, I beg you to go forthwith to that same Brother Silvester and to our Sister Clare, and bid them ask God to enlighten them on the matter. You, Brother John, go down into the village, and beg the villagers to respect our solitude for to-day. I have sinned too gravely against humility for my words to be of any use to them. Unless God commands the opposite, I shall without doubt speak no more henceforward. Meanwhile Brother Juniper shall go and get you your food, and I will stay behind with you, my dear Brother Leo, for you to question me, and examine me, and correct me. Be off, my children.

*They all, save LEO, prostrate themselves and kiss the hem of his tunic. Then, save LEO, they go off in various directions.*

FRANCIS. This would be the proper time for saying Prime and Terce, Brother Lamb . . . but, you remember, we had to give our breviaries in payment for the visits of the doctor to that poor old woman whose both legs are bad . . . So till the good providence of God provides us with some more, this is how we shall talk—turn and turn about: I shall say to myself—“O Brother Francis, you committed so many sins, when you were in the world, that you ought to go to hell.” And then you answer, Leo, “It is perfectly true that you deserve hell.” And we shall say this over and over again so that I may get deep deep down into my worthlessness.

LEO. Very well, Father. In the Lord's Name. Begin. *(They walk to and fro side by side).*



FRANCIS. O Brother Francis, you committed so many sins when you were in the world that you are only fit for hell.

LEO. O Brother Francis, God will assuredly work so many marvels by means of you, that you will enter paradise.

FRANCIS. But—but—that isn't what you've got to say. I will say : " O Brother Francis, you have committed so many offences before God, that you deserve to be accursed for evermore." And you will take care to answer : " Yes, you are certainly fit to be placed among the lost."

LEO. Very well.

FRANCIS. O God of heaven and earth, I have committed so many offences before Thee, that I deserve to be for ever damned.

LEO. God shall make thee such an one among the saved as to be blessed beyond others.

FRANCIS. What is the matter, Brother Leo ? Why do you not answer as I told you to ? In the name of the most holy virtue of Obedience, I order you to answer exactly as I shall bid you. So I will say first : " Ah wretched creature, drest thou that God will have pity upon thee, and knowest thou not that thou deservest no mercy ?" And you, Brother Sheep, must answer : " Yes, yes—without doubt you are utterly unworthy of mercy."

LEO. Very well, very well : begin again.

FRANCIS. Ah wretched creature, does thou dream that God shall have pity upon thee ?

LEO. I know that God the Father, whose mercy is infinite and is far far greater than any sin, will have compassion upon thee and overwhelm thee with his grace.

FRANCIS. But, Brother Leo, that's quite quite wrong. Why are you going against obedience and why do you always answer the opposite of what I told you to ?

LEO. God knows, my dearest Father. Each time, I

meant to answer as you bade me. But it must have been God who made me answer as He chose, and not according to what I intended.

FRANCIS (*kneeling*). My dear dear child, when I accuse myself again, I beg you on both knees, say what I tell you to, that I deserve no pardon.

LEO. Say it again, Father, and I will try to answer as you bid me.

FRANCIS. O wretched wretched Francis, do you really think that God will have pity on your tears?

LEO. But of course, Father—God will have mercy on His servant. He will glorify him in eternity, since he who humbles himself shall be exalted . . . And I shall never be able to say anything else, since it is God Himself who speaks through my mouth. (*Pause*) Don't be too annoyed with me, Father.

FRANCIS (*rising*). I thank you, Brother Leo. I will not say it again. (*He lets himself sink on to the slope and hides his face in his hands.* BROTHER LEO remains standing by him. A long silence. Then, heavily . . .) Brother Leo, write. You've got your tablets.

LEO. I think so.

FRANCIS. Now write this carefully. "Even though the Brothers Minor gave all the world over a perfect example of sanctity and good edification, that would not yet be the perfect joy." (*Pause*). Write, Brother Leo. "Even though a Brother Minor gave sight to the blind, made straight the cripples, cast out devils, restored hearing to the deaf and speech to the dumb, and life to men four days dead, not in that consists the perfect joy." (*Pause*.) "Though a Brother Minor knew every tongue, prophesied the future, tore each secret from each soul—write that not in that is the perfect joy" (*Pause*). "And even though"—yes, write it—"he talked the language of the angels, deciphered the goings of the stars, knew the virtue of each herb, of birds, of fish, of men, of trees, of stones,



O little sheep of God, the perfect joy is not yet in any any of it." (*Without pausing*) No, nor even, Brother Leo, "if by the spell of his eloquence, with the grace of God he converted every infidel to the Faith." Have you written that?

LEO. Yes, Father. But then, where is the perfect joy? In God's name I beg you tell me.

FRANCIS. Suppose we came this night to St. Mary of the Angels, or where you will, soaked with rain, frozen with cold, filthy with mud and racked with hunger, and that we rang at the door, and the porter came out and said: "Who are you"? and we answered: "We are two of your brothers," and he retorted: "You are two scallywags, bamboozling everyone and filching the alms of the poor." And suppose he refused to open the door and made us stop in the rain and the cold. And suppose that we succeeded in supporting patiently his insults, without a murmur, without distress of soul, and suppose we saw that this porter was knowing us for what we are,—really saw that!—and that it was God Himself who was guiding his tongue against us—now write this down well, Brother Leo—Therein consists the Perfect Joy. (*Pause*). And if we knocked again, and then he fell into a rage against us, and thrashed us well, and said everything he could against us . . . And then, with cold and hunger gnawing at us, we knocked yet again, praying and weeping, and then armed with a bludgeon he knocked us down into the mire and snow, and beat us till we were black and blue with bruises . . . And if we accepted with joy all this, violent treatment, reflecting that it is our duty to support patiently every anguish that Christ inflicts upon us—then and then only, Brother Leo, should we know what is the perfect joy. For among all the graces of the Spirit that Christ gives to His friends, none is more precious than the grace that enables us to support every insult for Christ and for the Love of God. (*The bells begin once more*). Now there are the bells ringing

again, and there are the villagers, despite my forbidding them, beginning to carry out branches in front of God's most worthless servant. And here am I, Brother Leo, a sinner who ought to hold his tongue and swore he would, making you a sermon as if he were in the pulpit of the Gospel. Away, Brother Lamb, and keep the crowd off. You, myself, the whole world, are for me but an occasion of doing wrong.

BROTHER LEO goes away quietly. ST. FRANCIS kneels down before the hillside. *The bells ring louder than ever and interwoven with their music you can hear the song of birds. Gradually, from all sides, you can see entering singly or in groups, little children representing birds. Many are in grey, with the Friars Minors' hoods: others are gay and variegated. They speak to music.*

BIRDS. He's alone . . . He's alone . . . come, come, come.

AN OLD WOODPECKER. Well, well! I haven't seen a man so close for ever so long. One always has to look out for stones—for arrows—for bird-lime!

BIRDS. Lovely, lovely, lovely . . .

A JAY. I don't know why it's lovely, but lovely it is . . .

WOODPECKER. This one is, anyway.

BIRDS. It's like nothing on earth. It's not like a tom-tit, nor a redbreast, nor a linnet, nor a swallow . . .

JAY. It isn't even like a bird at all: but for all that, it's lovely.

WILD PIGEON. But this one especially, brothers.

OLD SPARROW. Shall I tell you whom he's like? Like us, the sparrows. He's grey, he's lack-lustre, he has no glitter, he has no colours.

BIRDS. True, true . . .

PIGEON. And shall I tell you why we think him so much more beautiful than the rest?

WOODPECKER. Because we can go near him.

PIGEON. Of course. But why can we go near him? Because he is gentle.



BIRDS. Gentle, gentle—see how gentle he is.

SPARROW. One would like to talk to him. (*They assent*).

BIRDS. Let's talk to him—talk to him.

WOODPECKER. Little sparrows, what nonsense! One can't talk to men.

OLD CROW. I beg your pardon. The uncle of the great-grandfather of my parents' great-great-grandfather used to tell—it's my parents who told me—that in the days of the great-great-uncle of the great-grandfather of his parents' great-great-grandfather—it was they who told him—all the birds used to talk with men, even birds of prey. And when I say with "men," I mean with the man, for there was only one then, who lived with his wife and was king on land and sea.

BIRDS. Is that true? Is that really true?

MAGPIE. And did the birds talk to his wife too?

CROW. More even than with him, because she liked talking more than he did.

WREN. And weren't they frightened of the man?

CROW. Not a bit. In those days no one was frightened of anybody. For, so they say, no one wished any harm to anyone.

BIRDS. What? what? wonderful! . . .

CROW. Oh, that was long ago. Things changed all of a sudden. And all of a sudden everyone started fighting everyone else. We never understood why; but there is a reason . . .

SPARROW. Will those fine days come again?

CROW. Maybe, maybe. If this man here produce a number of others like himself—who knows?

BIRDS. Who knows?

WREN. What is he doing with his hands up like that?

CROW. I couldn't tell you.

FRANCIS. O loving Lord . . .

MAGPIE. What is he saying?

FRANCIS. O Creator of all things—of all good things.

SPARROW. What is he saying? what is he saying?

*Birds  
Francis*

CROW. Oh, we can't understand. Else we should have understood at once. .

FRANCIS. Creator of the sun, Creator of life, Creator of Grace . .

NIGHTINGALE. It makes one want to sing . .

BIRDS. Let's sing ! let's sing.

LINNET. Our sweetest song.

BIRDS. Our sweetest, sweetest song . .

SPARROW. What shall our song say ?

NIGHTINGALE. You know your song doesn't mean anything. Or if it does, we don't know what.

BIRDS. True . .true . .

CROW. Our first parents must have known. As for us, we sing . . because we do—by tradition.

LINNET. Because we've got the habit . .

NIGHTINGALE. And because we like it . .

BIRDS. Because we like it . .

LINNET. Because it gives us pleasure . .

NIGHTINGALE. And perhaps because *he* likes it, linnet.

BIRDS. Perhaps, perhaps.

NIGHTINGALE. So let's sing !

BIRDS. Sing !

NIGHTINGALE. I hardly ever sing except at night . . but still, for this once . .

*The BIRDS all come together like a choir and the bird-music rises. It must be both instrumental and vocal. After a space, it pauses.*

BIRDS. Again ! again !

*The melody begins again, and as often, in fact, as the conductor pleases. They call out "Again" before each new burst of song. FRANCIS rises as if suddenly in ecstasy, and, when the music stops, or is sufficiently quiet for him to be heard—*

FRANCIS. Oh—my dear little brothers, little birds, how well you sing ! I really must thank you—and congratulate you. I must tell you that since the sacred song of the Three Children in the burning fiery furnace, and the hymn of Mary Magnified, I have never heard



anything sung which has gone so straight to my heart. O my little troubadours of birds, at least you don't admire me, you don't flatter me—you aren't like the others. I used to think that the nightingale and the linnet and the—and even the least musical of you all, had been created for my sake—my glory—But no, it isn't so, and you don't conceal the fact! So by way of thanking you, I am going to preach you a sort of sermon. I haven't any more the right to preach to men, until indeed our Creator shall have declared His will. But preaching to little birds—that's a very different thing. If you understand me, so much the better. If you find me tedious, you must fly away. (*He takes a step forward. The BIRDS throng round him*). O my little brothers the birds, since Sin has darkened God's creation, here you are on the earth without knowing what you're there for. And you sing songs without any words. And there you live, without knowing what you're living for. Well, I'm going to tell you. I am going to translate for you the music that you keep sending up into the sky, in the woods, through the plain. I'm going to improvise myself the poet of your songs! Now listen to me:—

We sing the air that upbears us, the forest that gives us shelter, the down that dresses us, the grain that feeds us. . .

The spray that sways beneath us, the dew that gives us drink, the sun that warms us, the bright blue sky that dazzles us. . .

And the dusk that hushes us and the dawn that wakens us, and the fierce fire of noon. . .

And that we may properly praise the air, the woods, the down and the grain, the bough, the dew, the sun and the blue, blue sky, and dusk and dawn and day. . . let us not faint in saying—

Air of God, woods of God, feathers that God gave us, grain that God gives us—

Leaves of God, dew of God, sunlight of God, and O blue skies of God—

Night of God, noon of God, and God's dear dawn—

And again, and again—

O all God's gifts so good and fair, all from God, and all for the little birds of God. . .

And that's what you're singing without knowing it, my little brothers, because of this your freedom whereby you fly free everywhere, because of your dress so warm and thick, because of your feathers so wonderfully coloured and adorned. Because of the food that without toil of yours is given you, because of your very song itself that the Creator's self has taught you, because you are so many, and because your very nature, your nature of birds, was mercifully preserved by God within the ark, and by Him multiplied ever since; because, in fine, of this element of air, that you do use as God doth please.

For you sow not neither do you reap, but God provideth for your needs, and gives you rivers that you may drink there, and rocks, that you may seek refuge there, and trees that you may build your nests there—and though you weave nor sew not, yet, from Him too, you have your raiment.

And you see well how the Creator loves you, since He has done you so many loving kindnesses.

So you will be careful, if you have understood me so perfectly as you've been listening to me, never to be ungrateful, my little feathered troubadours, and always diligently to praise God in your songs. (*Pause*). Do you agree?

BLACK BIRD. Yes, yes, yes.

FRANCIS. I want to tell you another thing. The Creator has given no less to man, but even more. Yet man sings Him no songs. . . But I would like the Friars Minor, becoming just like you, like the least of all you little ones, like the tiny sparrow in his grey



dress, to become many, like you, through the inpouring of the Holy Spirit, and, abandoning themselves to Providence for food and drink and vesture, to fly away through the world just as if they had wings, and cover the earth with the uninterrupted praise of God. Now say three times what I am going to say, to the glory of the Most Holy Trinity—Blessed be the Lord !

BIRDS. Blessed be the Lord.

*And forthwith a song of birds uprises, like one great Alleluia of instruments and voices, which breaks off at its highest for FRANCIS and the birds to say again : Blessed be the Lord : and after the same music, they say it the third time. Then the same music, but enriched and more ecstatic. During the sermon, there have arrived one after the other, BROTHER LEO from the back ; from the Left, the two PEASANTS, of whom the younger is carrying a cage in his hand. By the Right BROTHER JUNIPER and BROTHER JOHN. They all crouch down, kneeling, behind the bushes to watch what is going on. As the song finishes, BROTHER MASSEO finally appears on the Right.*

FRANCIS. Someone's coming . . . be off with you ! *He makes a great sign of the cross over the birds. They go out backwards, whispering—*

BLACKBIRD. Goodbye, Brother Francis. . . *A great whirr of wings is heard in the music, and they all stand up looking at the sky in amazement.*

YOUNG PEASANT. Look—look.

OLD PEASANT. Marvellous—Ho ! They're all flying away together.

YOUNG PEASANT. They're massed like an army.

OLD PEASANT. But they're making four battalions.

YOUNG PEASANT. They're dividing up—

LEO. One's going north—

JUNIPER. One south—

LEO. One towards the sunrise—

JUNIPER. And one to sunset.

YOUNG PEASANT. A cross ! a cross—they're making a cross.

OLD PEASANT. True.

MASSEO. And the four arms of the cross reach all horizons.

LEO. They will reach from world's end to world's end.

JOHN. And they're singing—

YOUNG AND OLD PEASANT. Oh, hark at them singing. . .

*The song begins again, triumphant, in the distance. All bow. Then FRANCIS to MASSEO.*

FRANCIS. Tell me, Brother Masseo—what does our Lord, Jesus Christ, bid me do ?

MASSEO. I began by asking Brother Silvester in his cave, and then Sister Clare in her convent. Without saying anything to one another, they answered me alike—the same words exactly. (*FRANCIS kneels to receive the word of God, his head bared and his arms stretched out like a cross.*) The Lord wills that Brother Francis should be told that it is not for his salvation alone that he has been called, but that he may reap an abundant harvest of souls, by prayer, and by example, by his presence and his voice.

LEO. To the four winds of heaven, like the birds, my dear Father.

OLD PEASANT. Yes. The birds think the same. (*FRANCIS, after remaining bowed for a moment rises.*)

FRANCIS. On, then, in God's Name.

YOUNG PEASANT. Couldn't you stay yet a moment, Father ?

FRANCIS. I have received word to go. . .

YOUNG PEASANT. We could talk as we went . . . I will go as far as need be.

OLD PEASANT. As far as need be ? with the hay not brought in . . . ?

FRANCIS. Let him speak.

YOUNG PEASANT. There. I'm caught. Properly caught. And not with the broomstick, like the



brother there (*he points to JOHN*). Nor by cooking, like that one. I'm a bird-catcher—I know how to set traps better than anyone. I've got a golden crested wren here in my cage—I caught it last night with bird-lime. But look—I'll let it go. (*He opens the cage and the bird flies off*). I'd step into its place, if I weren't too big. There. I used to think I was quite as good a Christian as God asked of me: the Father could have preached to me for all he's worth and have got nothing from me. But I heard him talking to the birds and all of a sudden I was ashamed to find I was less of a Christian than a magpie was. . . Suddenly I resolved to make peace with them. And with all the creatures of God, man included. And so I will follow the Saint.

OLD PEASANT. But my boy—

YOUNG PEASANT. You won't come too?

OLD PEASANT. The hay isn't in.

YOUNG PEASANT. You have no one now to leave it to. What use is it, now?

JUNIPER. I will get it in, if you like.

YOUNG PEASANT. And the Brothers shall lie upon it when they come back through the village.

LEO. Good. It shall serve the vagabonds of God. . .

OLD PEASANT. Very well—very well. I'll come in spite of all. I was right to be on my guard, my boy! I shan't be caught twice.

LEO. You are caught! (*Pause*).

FRANCIS. God be praised, who has need of no more than a bird that sings, or a sinner like me, to convert a soul! Let us go and preach the Cross of Christ if we carry it not yet. . .

LEO. Can't we both preach and carry it?

FRANCIS. May God grant it! Come.

*The sound of bells, louder and louder. Noise of the approaching crowd.*

CROWD. The Saint! the Saint! Hurrah for the Saint!  
FRANCIS *exit followed by the Brothers.*

## ACT IV

*A forest on Mount Alverno. Centre the little bridge of boughs over the torrent. Left FRANCIS'S hut.*

*A music tense, slow and stark, depicting the sheer mountain and the toiling pilgrims. Enter Brothers FRANCIS, MASSEO, ILLUMINATO, ANGELO, LEO, Right.*

FRANCIS (*stopping by the bridge*). Do not come any further, my dear little brothers, you, Brother Masseo Marignano of Assisi, you, Brother Angelo Tancred de' Ricci, you Brother Illuminato, and you, Brother Leo. You have been kind enough to follow me and help me in this long ascent of Mount Alverna where I have resolved to go into retreat and spend forty days fasting in honour of my Lord St. Michael, the Archangel. In the name of Jesus and His holy Mother, thanks ! (*Pause*). The Lord Orlando, who made us the gift of this mountain, sent his servants ahead of us to build us each a hut. Mine is a stone's cast further, the other side of the bridge. Yours, at the end of this path, in the shade. Come no further, dear little brothers, for here I leave you, and it is time for you to rest. Our brother Body, that is the dwelling of our sister Soul, and that we must love less than we love her, none the less deserves some thought from us, and when he reaches, all drenched, a level, friendly place like this, with pleasant couches of turf, we haven't the right to refuse him leave to profit by it. Brother Masseo, Brother Angelo, Brother Illuminato, Brother Leo, sit you down and listen to me. (*They all sit down on a slope*). I am drawing close to the end of my short life. And I have made very little of it, being, as you know, the



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most wretched of my brothers. You agree, don't you ?

LEO. Brother Francis, I would tell you the exact opposite. For the opposite is the truth and nothing else. But you would bully me. .

FRANCIS. Brother Leo, you are too fond of saying nice things. It's a pet fault of yours. But God will not regard it as a sin in you, for your compliments come from a good heart. I, then, the poorest of all my brothers, have daringly resolved to live the few years that remain to me as well as I can. And so as to be no more tempted, as I daily am, to injure you by act, by omission, by word and by thought, I will be no more with you in body nor even in mind, but in heart alone, and all my thoughts shall be for God. Perhaps, too, I shall avoid in this way increasing the burden that weighs already so heavy on my shoulders, and, by imitating in some manner the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ, I may not have too much to suffer on the other slope of life, when I shall have passed the topmost ridge and am about to render my account to God. So you must keep so far from me as Providence has decided, and never leave the neighbourhood of your huts. And if at times my voice shall reach you, pay no attention, for I wish to be quite free to weep my heart out over my poor sins. And do you think on yours. You, and you alone, brother Leo, must come once each night, with a little bread and some water. You must come in silence, and stop at the little bridge of branches that is over the torrent. Then you must say : *Domine, labia mea aperies*, as at the beginning of office, and if I answer, you may cross the bridge, and come as far as my hut where we will say Matins together. If I don't answer, you must put down the bread and the water, and go back quick. You understand, Brother Lamb ?

LEO. Yes, Father, but may I repeat the *Domine labia mea* twice ?

FRANCIS. No.

LEO. But if there is a great wind in the leaves ?

FRANCIS. No.

LEO. At least I may wait till the wind is still, and then. . . ?

FRANCIS. No.

LEO. Or till you have come back to yourself ? You are so absent-minded !

FRANCIS. No, no, Brother Lamb. I have come here precisely that I may absent myself from all that is the world. And God grant that ever I may be absent. . . You understand ?

LEO. Very well.

FRANCIS. Come all of you, and let me bless you. (*They kneel and he blesses them*). Listen to the song of the birds and the voice of the water on the stones ! God has given us all this music to teach us to keep silence . . . from time to time . . . Now leave me. *He crosses the bridge : they exeunt right. The day fades. FRANCIS kneels before his hut, left. Music, to indicate that time is passing. Several days elapse*).

## II

FRANCIS *on his knees, but fainting, before his hut, at the forest's edge.*

FRANCIS. Oh, Lord—so tired ; so tired. . . Lord, I am not complaining : never shall I enough chastise this body of death. But what shall I do, if it refuses to carry the soul to the road's end ? By day, by night, I fast and I do battle, for the devil knows when hunger is mastering me : he chooses his moment and then flings himself in full force upon me. But I continue to rise early for Matins, and wait late for Compline : and I add Hours that have no name in the books. Save for that good bird that wakes me with the whirr of his wings, I should sleep all day long and never think once of Thee. If he does, now and again, give me



a few minutes' grace, that is all—he never forgets that I must serve Thee rigidly and regularly. Ah, I do not complain, no, no—why, my soul, laid hold upon by Thee, carries my body high—high as are those beech-trees. . . But, Lord, when I am back on earth, then am I broken. Then seek I for some spiritual sustenance that should support the body too. Lord, I have tried to carry Thy Cross—it was too heavy for me. Suffer me to dream of the endless glory and the immeasurable joy of the blessed, in the forest of life everlasting! Is that to filch somewhat—too much—from my Lent of penance and contrition? Dare I not hope to taste one drop of heavenly strength from the chalice wherein they drink, and whose fulness runs not dry? They see Thee—they see Thee—they see Thee. . .

One, and Three—

Lord, my soul is a furnace of love for Thee. . .

When shall I see Thee?

They hear Thee, O Word—they hear Thee!

Lord, Thy Word outpasseth in its significance all the unreckonable treasure-house of human language. . .

Shall I hear Thee?

Spirit of Love, they clasp Thee. . .

Lord, dig deeper yet in me that well that naught that is human shall fill, but that Thy lips, with but a breath, shall fill. . .

Come, O Lord.

*An angel appears with his viol.*

ANGEL. Francis, from the Angel of all harmony, thou shalt hear but a single note; yet shall it fulfil thy heart within thy breast like the whole music of a song. Listen, and cleave fast to earth. Thus doth begin, for him who enters, pure, into that kingdom whereafter thou dost yearn, the eternal melody that is sung before the Most High God. Listen. . .

*A single stroke from his bow ascends, and, as it soars away, a whole harmony is born spontaneously from its over-tones.*

FRANCIS. Again—again—My soul is struggling free and would fain mount on high—but my body holds her back—No. No. If thy bow falls even once again upon another note, the string will break, and I shall perish. Lord—Lord!

*The note hangs still in the air: FRANCIS remains in ecstasy. The angel gently withdraws. After a while, enter BROTHER LEO.*

*(At the bridge-head) Domine, labia mea aperies.*

*Silence. He repeats it twice and then sees FRANCIS. With an exclamation, he advances and crosses the bridge.*

FRANCIS. Who art Thou, my God? most loving God? And who am I, a most vile worm, Thy useless servant?

*A voice that echoes the music answers afar off and a light shines among the boughs. FRANCIS spreads his hands wide, and LEO advances nearer.*

FRANCIS. Who art Thou, my God? Most loving God? And who am I, a most vile worm, Thy useless servant?

*The same voice answers again.*

FRANCIS. Who art Thou, my God? most loving God? And who am I, a most vile worm, Thy useless servant?

*The voice answers, he stretches out his hands, prostrates himself, and the flame dies down.*

LEO *(withdrawing)*. Glory to God, and peace be to Francis, and joy within me and in the hearts of all my brothers. Joy, joy, joy for us all. That one of ours should thus be visited! Joy makes me speak too loud: but our brother is too far off to hear me.

*As he approaches the bridge, he makes the leaves rustle.*

*FRANCIS without turning round calls him.*

FRANCIS. Brother Lamb. *(LEO stands still)*. Brother Lamb, go no further. I heard the leaves awake beneath thy steps. Wait for me.

LEO. O Lord—I am caught.



FRANCIS. You are waiting for me ?

LEO. Yes, Father dear. (*He turns away like a school-boy caught out in some fault. FRANCIS meets him*).

FRANCIS. Who art thou ?

LEO. Brother Leo, Father.

FRANCIS. Brother Leo ? Impossible. I know Brother Leo well and love him like a son. I know he has some faults, as we all have ; less than I have, I own. But not . . . not . . . For Brother Leo is tactful. Brother Leo is obedient. Brother Leo knows I am in retreat. Every night, towards Matins, he has to bring me my food for next day. But it has been understood between us that when I do not answer him, it means that my duty is elsewhere and that he must go back to his brothers. He knows that. He promised me. He would not like to hurt me, for he loves me as I do him. Besides, by the rule he owes me obedience. No—it isn't Brother Leo.

LEO. It's him all the same, Father. And he is all that you say he is.

FRANCIS. Why did you come here, Brother Lamb ? and why did you pass the bridge ? and why did you keep watching me like a man who spies out evil ?

LEO. Oh, there was no chance of that. But I saw you so beautifully in prayer that I couldn't help staying longer than I should for very delight. It makes one so happy—seeing people pray well.

FRANCIS. Are you so sure that I was praying well, dear Brother ? Could you hear me ?

LEO. Oh, Father Francis. . .

FRANCIS. Tell the truth. . .

LEO. I would not lie—but tell the truth, how could I ?

FRANCIS. Well, I order you to say all that you saw.

LEO. Father, it wasn't strictly speaking a prayer. At least, we don't ever pray like that. Anyway, prayer or not, you repeated three times the same words. "Who art Thou, my God, most loving God ?

and who am I, a most vile worm, Thy useless servant?" And you began again—"Who art Thou—and, Who am I?"

FRANCIS. And you stayed for all three times, Brother Lamb?

LEO. I was wrong, Father. I accuse myself of my fault . . . (*he kneels*).

FRANCIS. No, no. Get up. But of course no one answered? How should a man ask God who He is?

LEO. I don't know, Father.

FRANCIS. Tell the truth. You know something.

LEO. I know—I know that I saw fire in the trees, and that thrice you stretched your arms out . . . and that the answer escaped me. It was—verse rather than prose—music rather than verse—rather—rather than music—ah, I know not what.

FRANCIS. Anyhow, you didn't understand. That is what matters.

LEO. But Father, my dear Father, you understood?

FRANCIS. What should you know about it?

LEO. O Father, Father, tell the truth. And if but you would do me the greatest favour, you would tell me what God answered to that rash prayer of yours. (*Pause*).

FRANCIS. My dear little Brother Lamb. . . Since Our Lord answered me, who am so far below Him, I surely may answer thee, who art far above myself, yet not too far to understand me. While I was saying the words that you overheard, know then little brother, that a twofold beam of light struck my heart. And I received the knowledge of God and of myself. "Who art Thou, God, O loving God?" said I, and my gaze plunged into the dazzling infinite abyss of His wisdom. "And I, who am I?" And I could see opening beneath me the abyss of my own nothingness. Then was I ashamed that He should have deigned to visit me. But the almighty Voice gave me command: "Francis, make me three gifts." "But what gifts, Lord? I am



all Thine and possess no thing." "Francis, seek in thy bosom." And putting my hand into a fold of my robe, I found three fruits, round and golden, and I gave them to the Lord. One was the fruit of poverty, the next the fruit of chastity, and the best, obedience. There was no stain of decay upon them, no wound of any worm; and having given them, I possessed them better still. (*Pause*). Away with you, Brother Lamb. What remains to be said, is not for you. In a few days, God will work upon this mountain things so wonderful that they shall shine forth in all the world: things so new that never their like was heard.

LEO. Father, I kneel, and I beg from you forgiveness.

FRANCIS. Yes, yes, you are forgiven. But kneel not to me, little brother. Lend me your book a moment: or rather, open it at random. I will read. (*BROTHER LEO does so*).

LEO. See, Father.

FRANCIS. Then Pilate said: What then shall I do with Jesus, that is called Christ? They answered. . .

LEO. Crucify Him.

FRANCIS. Good. Close the book, little brother, and begin again. (*LEO shuts and then opens the book, and reads again*). "When they had crucified him, they parted his garments. . ." Once more, Brother Leo. . . "But when they came to Jesus, seeing that he was already dead, they brake not His legs, but one of the soldiers opened His side with a lance, and there came forth blood and water." (*Pause. He shuts the book*). Thank you, Brother Lamb. I think I know what God wants of me. Go home. But promise me not to be tactless any more. . . Go along. . . (*LEO goes away. FRANCIS returns to his hut, and an angel like the first one enters softly Right and strikes his shoulder, saying—*)

ANGEL. Francis, I have come to strengthen you, dear brother. Are you ready?

FRANCIS. Yes.

ANGEL. Your prayer was heard. You asked, within

your heart, for two graces. To suffer so far as possible all that the Son of Man once suffered : and to experience so far as possible the Love that made Him seek to suffer, being God. So come with me.

FRANCIS bows : rises and follows the angel into the wood.

*The stage remains empty. The moonlight that was bathing the forest, fades. A stormy music in the distance. Darkness falls impenetrable, and the tempest fills the night. BROTHER LEO, ANGELO, MASSEO and ILLUMINATO grope their way in from the Right.*

LEO. Brother Masseo, is that you ?

MASSEO. Yes, I. And you are Brother Leo—I recognise your voice.

LEO. Where is Brother Angelo ?

ANGELO. Here.

MASSEO. Brother Illuminato is not with us.

ILLUMINATO. I am coming, I'm coming. . .

ANGELO. Where are we going ?

LEO. We are like fledglings seeking for their mother.

MASSEO. Brother Francis said we were not to cross the bridge.

LEO. O, I should not dream of crossing it. Here it is. I think I am holding the rail. Stop ! We shall be nearer our Father here. *They all meet at the bridge-head.*

MASSEO. What a wind !

ANGELO. How dark !

ILLUMINATO. And now thunder.

LEO. It must be the end of the world. Let us huddle up close together and commit our souls to God.

MASSEO. Our poor sins—how heavy they are, Brother Leo !

LEO. Heavy indeed are they.

ANGELO. How shall we appear before God with this weight upon our backs ?

ILLUMINATO. Don't let us think about ourselves, little brothers. And since it is the season of the



Exaltation of the Holy Cross let us enter into the Crucifixion of the Lord.

THE REST. Yes, Brother Illuminato.

ILLUMINATO. And silence.

THE REST. Silence !

*They kneel down in a semi-circle, their elbows touching. Silence. Then the storm-music grows still louder : an unearthly glow lights up the sky and the trees, whence five fierce flashes will proceed corresponding with the five wounds on the body of the Saint : each is emphasised in the music by an outcry wherein the poignant must be joined with the sweet.)*

ILLUMINATO. The first nail enters the right hand. .

THE REST. O dearest Lord ! (*First cry of the music, and first flash. Pause*).

ILLUMINATO. The second nail is entering the left hand. . .

THE REST. O dearest Lord ! (*Second cry of the music, and second flash. Pause*).

ILLUMINATO. And a third, into the right foot. . .

THE REST. O dearest Lord ! (*Third cry of the music, and third flash. Pause*).

ILLUMINATO. And again, the left foot. . .

THE REST. O dearest Lord ! (*Fourth cry of the music, and fourth flash. Pause*).

*The music climbs to agony-pitch and after a shriek relapses.*

ILLUMINATO. The Lance opens the side. . . (*Fifth cry of the music, and fifth flash. Pause*). And the heart of God outpours itself upon us.

THE REST. O Lord, O Lord. . .

*After the fifth outcry, which is at once followed by a furious clap of thunder, the music unfolds itself triumphantly, like the glory of a seraph, and then suffers its joy to fade into a calm and even tone. A gentle dawnlight. The brothers rise, their eyes streaming with tears.*

ILLUMINATO. The dawn of pardon kneels upon the

mountains. Hark—the flocks are waking. It is not midnight, yet here, behold, the day !

ALL (*They embrace one another*). Our sins are forgiven !

ILLUMINATO. Yes ; let us be glad together. But who has just espoused the sufferings of the Christ ?

Long Pause. *Little by little the dawn dies out : moonlight again : FRANCIS is seen entering Left, walking with difficulty and holding his arms stretched away from his body.*

ALL. Hail, Brother Francis.

FRANCIS. Are you there, little brothers ?

LEO. What a night, Brother Francis !

ALL. What a night !

LEO. We saw the heavens open . . . we were so frightened. . .

FRANCIS. Frightened ?

LEO. That is why we came to this place. And then it dawned . . . quite a different dawn from the dawn of every day. And look, it's gone away already. Ah, what a night ! (*Pause*). Have you nothing to say to us ?

FRANCIS. God is great.

LEO. God is great—of course . . . of course. But all the same—nothing astonishes you, true. (*Jestingly.*) Aha ! you were asleep, perhaps ? (*Still silent*). Does it hurt you to walk ?

FRANCIS. A little.

LEO. A lot. You must have wounded yourself against a stone. Let me see that foot.

FRANCIS. It's nothing.

LEO. Are your hands hurting you ? Why are you holding them out before you like that—all stiff. Did you fall on your hands ?

FRANCIS. No, Brother Leo.

LEO. Don't hide them in your sleeves.

MASSEO. Oh, Father, you must surely be in pain. You put your hand to your side.



ALL. What has happened to you? (*They surround him*).

FRANCIS. Please—please . . . I look happy, don't I? Ask me no more.

LEO. But I see blood on your dress.

FRANCIS. Brother Leo!

LEO. You wouldn't have me tell a lie? I can't say I don't see it when I do. (*Pause*).

FRANCIS. Yes, brothers. To-night God has done great things. And they must remain between His servant and Himself.

ILLUMINATO. My brothers—my brothers—I believe I have understood. . . (*Prostrates himself before FRANCIS*). Oh, Father.

FRANCIS. Rise up, my son. And listen to me. I want to ask your advice. Suppose that one of you had been taken into a secret—by God—had been allowed to witness marvellous things, inexpressibly marvellous things? Don't you think that God, in acting thus, implies that He wishes the matter to be kept secret? else, He would have showed it to other men too.

ILLUMINATO. Wait, dear Father. If God failed to show it to others, that was because they were unworthy to see it.

FRANCIS. No one is ever worthy.

ILLUMINATO. Granted, granted. Assume they were actually incapable. But, even though they received no direct and open vision, perhaps they are not forbidden to receive an indirect one. And if the direct vision was of avail to him who saw, it would be wrong of him not to cause the others, by letting them see it indirectly, to have a like profit.

FRANCIS. You really think that?

ILLUMINATO. When our brother the Sun makes gift of his rays to our sister Moon, our sister hesitates not forthwith to reflect them likewise to our sister earth and to them that dwell therein. If she refused, she would be blameworthy, as would be the brother of

whom you spoke but whose name you did not mention. This moonlight proves you wrong, Father. And who, pray, was this brother? (*Pause*).

FRANCIS. O Brother Illuminato, you see much that remains hidden to the rest of men—and in this matter you are right. Pain though it be to speak, yet may I not hold back in my heart a revelation that may profit you. But know well, that if God has chosen me, it was that nowhere might He find a coarser clay wherein to manifest his master-craftsmanship, whereby He fashions men, and whereon to impress the likeness of His divine Son. Sit down. You shall hear from me what He did. (*They sit at his feet, overwhelmed*). Well, then, at the very heart of my prayer, there came and smote me the summons of a seraph who plunged from heaven with a most rapid flight, as of an eagle in the storm. Then did he stay, and poised above my head. He had six wings of fire, delicate yet strong, and two were extended straight above his head, two were spread wide to fly, and the remaining two so descended as to veil his limbs. And this eagle or this Seraph was in the likeness of a man crucified. Our Lord Jesus Christ, Himself, resting upon His cross, was gazing upon me with much mercy, and was filling me with fear, with wonder, with pity and with joy. Oh Seraph eternal—oh Flesh of Thy mortality! Thy divinity and Thy humanity together—in one single most true fire, carrying its conflagration into my soul—and my soul was indeed transformed into the perfect likeness of Christ upon His Cross. Love—love—love! (*Pause*). And in that hour, my body, like plastic earth, was lending itself to the will of the divine love, and, when I came to myself, I found on me Its marks. . .

LEO. In your hands—

MASSEO. Your feet—

ALL. Your side. . .

(*They all prostrate themselves*). Oh, Father. . .

FRANCIS. Since then, my children, joy and pain have



me between them. One is in my soul, one in my flesh. And the crueller the one, the sweeter is the other. Such is the law I carry in me, at the gift of God.

LEO. We will kiss your hands like His—

MASSEO. Your feet—

ANGELO. Your side—

FRANCIS. No—draw back. When these wounds bleed over-much, Brother Leo shall bandage them, but you others will act as though I had said nothing.

ILLUMINATO. (*bowing to kiss his hand*). Once, Father—your hand?

ALL. Once. . . ?

FRANCIS. Well, but let your lips press light. And may the fire that wounded me touch your own hearts. (*Each bows to kiss his right hand*). And now, my little brothers, I leave you. My Lent is ended; I go down from this holy hill, whereof I leave you henceforward the guardianship. Be it bathed ever in prayer, in praise, in tears! The Lord God has entrusted to me other mysteries yet, but you will not be told them while I live. I must finish my life in the plain where I was born, but what is that now to me? I have already passed through death. My beloved little brothers, farewell. (*He embraces them and begins to depart. He staggers*).

LEO. You would not go down alone, Father? Christ suffered Simon to help Him carry His own cross.

FRANCIS. Come, then, Brother Lamb, since it is you too who must tend these wounds. You that remain, forget not the secret of that perfect joy, that God in His goodness has confided to me—ininitely more fair than ever I had dreamed. (*As he goes out*). Love—love—

*Exit Right leaning on LEO. They fall prostrate. Dawn, and in the midst of the wakening bird-music, they intone the superb Canticle of the Sun.*

## ACT V

*The convent of St. Damian, in the low, vaulted room where the Poor Ladies, daughters of St. Clare, hear Mass. A wide opening at the back, closed by a grille, gives on to the choir of the church: a black curtain is stretched across it up to half its height: above this, in the darkness, can be seen the bright spark of the sanctuary lamp: higher still, and hanging on the wall, the crucifix with gold background that spoke to St. Francis. Door Right. Door Left. One armed chair; and mean benches along the walls. A wax candle.*

*The end of Lauds can be heard from without. Then, in deep silence, the Poor Ladies enter Right. They come two by two—ten or twelve of them. As they approach the door Left the Sub-Prioress stops them.*

MOTHER AGNES. Though it is against our holy rule, yet according to the spirit of charity, Mother Abbess permits us to pray for the soul of Brother Francis, from Lauds till Prime, in the presence of the Blessed Body of Christ and before the holy image that spoke to our Father. (*Pause*). Pray too for Mother Abbess, who is kept nailed to her bed by sickness and sorrow. Thus will you help her to support the hardest trial that the wholesome and severe grace of God has ever imposed upon her.

A YOUNG SISTER. Our Father is dead?

MOTHER AGNES. You know it all too well.

ANOTHER SISTER. But he had promised that we should see him again on this earth.

MOTHER AGNES. He has never broken a promise.

A YOUNG SISTER. But he is dead. . .



MOTHER AGNES (*calming her*). Let us pray for the repose of the dead that have died in the Lord.

*They take up a position in two rows along the side-walls opposite to one another, and then kneel, turning a little towards the choir. MOTHER AGNES is the nearest on the Right. They pray long in silence. Then the De Profundis, intoned by MOTHER AGNES. The right and then the left choirs take it up alternately. Pause.*

MOTHER AGNES. Meditation. (*Pause*). Let us fix our eyes on the miraculous image that we are so happy and so privileged to possess, and that in this very place bowed towards our Father to tell him God's holy will. (*They all raise their heads and look fixedly at the cross. Pause*). Recall that our Divine Lord Crucified drew our Father to him by the power of a word. That He laid him on the bed of the Cross by clasping him to His Heart. That He has lifted him higher still so as to cause him to dwell within His very Heart, in the love of the Most Holy Trinity. (*Pause*). Let us lay ourselves beside him on that same wood of the Cross, like faithful spouses. Born anew by that word of majesty, and that most loving embrace, let us justify by our own fervour the loving work of our Father, so that the Father of Heaven may place him in the shadow of his glory, and proclaim aloud in the presence of all the Elect: O Francis, be thou blessed amongst all men, for thou hast rebuilt My house." (*A long pause. Then, with less strain in her voice—*) Now let us sing the sacred song that we received from a convent of Navarre, composed by Father José Antonio whom God bless for what he wrote.

*Pause. They begin in unison, and continue either a few at a time, or all together, alternately.*

My Fair Love sleepeth on the Cross ;

Amid the whispers of the leaves.

O gentle breeze, sing softer, in the leafy elm ;

While my Fair Love, while my Fair Love, doth sleep.

Trouble not His rest !  
He that loves well, sleeps ill.  
The Cross chose He whereon to sleep  
The sleep that me doth save.  
He sleeps, but His heart still waketh ;  
His heart waketh upon my joy.  
O gentle breeze, sing softer, in the leafy elm ;  
While my Fair Love, while my Fair Love, doth sleep.

O couch of wood, so strait, so hard,  
Where, me to save, my God doth lay Him down !  
The burden of my debt weigheth upon Him ;  
For me, Paradise hath He won.  
He sleeps : O my sisters, watch  
Over the sleep of our Beloved.  
O gentle breeze, sing softer, in the leafy elm ;  
While my Fair Love, while my Fair Love, doth sleep.

*During the last stanza, the door opens Left and the Abbess, CLARE OF ASSISI, enters silently, supported by a lay-sister. She is holding a scroll of parchment. As the song finishes, MOTHER AGNES sees her and prostrates herself at her feet.*

MOTHER AGNES. Mother—

CLARE (*lifting her up*). My daughters, have no fear for me. Our blessed Father is not forgetting us. He has but now succoured me in my bodily anguish that I might share with you his beloved presence. Good Brother Leo has sent to me this precious document, in which his last words, his last actions, his last lessons were written down. I left my bed in order that you might hear them. Rise ; and now sit down. Brother Francis is in the midst of you : it is he that shall speak to you.

ABBESS CLARE *sits down on the armed chair offered to her by MOTHER AGNES, in front, Left. The Sisters silently sit down on the benches at the sides. Silence. Then the Abbess reads— :*



God give us peace. Since the day when our blessed Father Francis, who asked but for a death that should equal his life in poverty, caused himself to be carried from the bishop's palace to his hut at the Portiuncula, escorted by the guards and the whole people of Assisi—and it was that same day that he blessed his native town, a blessing that shall ensure thereunto an eternal privilege and honour—his body ceased not to sink down towards the earth, in proportion as his soul seemed to mount ever nearer heaven. Sister Jacoba, his holy penitent, came from Rome to visit him, and brought him his shroud, and also the incense and the tapers. In order to please her, he expressed a wish for a certain dish that she was skilled, he knew, to prepare : it was Brother Bernard, who, at his order, ate it in his stead. On the first day of October, he summoned together all the brothers who had come flocking from the mountains and gone flocking to the plain. He put his right hand upon the head of Brother Bernard, and, speaking to me, Brother Leo : “ Write thus,” said he. “ So far as I can, I desire and command that all the Brothers should do honour to Brother Bernard as if he were myself. He was the first to follow me, having given his goods to the poor. Let them all remain faithful to Lady Poverty and attached to this humble house where I sheltered her when she was a lonely wanderer. Let them remain obedient to the Holy Rule of our Order, which has always been observed in this house. Driven forth by one gate, let them enter in by the other, for it is the gate of heaven. Brother Leo, be sure to tell all the Brothers—all who are and ever shall be brothers—over all the wide surface of the earth and in the depth of the years to be—and to our sisters the Poor Ladies, and to the daughter of my heart, Sister Clare—that I bless them all I can—yes, and more than I can.” He meant by that, that God would fill up the measure. All the brothers were weeping. Then they stripped him of his garments, and laid him naked on the earth.



You could hear him reproaching himself for not having lived in complete destitution. From the hands of his guardian he received the dress of his own death, with the cord, the hood, the breeches, and he caused a piece to be sewn upon it. On Friday, as one had to hope and fear, Lady Suffering came to the support of Lady Poverty. Our Father cried aloud in his pain. Like in all points to his Master, he asked for a loaf and blessed it and divided it among all his brothers. Then he caused the gospel for Maundy Thursday to be read to him, where our Lord washes the feet of His apostles ; and he said three times : " You will do to one another what our Lord has done to you." Saturday was to be his last day. There was not a cloud in the sky. He had himself carried into the fields—his poor eyes no more shrank from the light. He asked us to sing once more the glorious Canticle of the Sun, and he himself whispered the two last praises added :

Praise be Thou, O Lord, for all those who, for love of Thee, forgive their enemies,  
And who must undergo unjust sufferings.  
And happy they who persevere in peace—  
By Thee shall they be crowned.

Praised be Thou, O Lord, for our Sister Bodily Death,  
Whom no living man escapes.  
Unhappy only they who die in sin,  
But happy they who have done all Thy holy will,  
For the second death cannot harm them.

But his ill grew worse, and he was taken back into the hut. To please him, we had to sprinkle ashes over him. For, said he, I shall soon be only dust and ashes. He also begged his guardian to unclothe him when the last moment came, and place him on the ground. There was but one fear left in him—that of not dying poor enough. The sun was sinking, and our Father had no strength left to speak. But when night fell,



he seemed suddenly to recover the fulness of his mortal life. He sat up on his bed, and recited the psalm of David *Voce mea*—with a strong voice, but a voice somehow not wholly his, and supported, too, by the voice of yet others.

I cried to the Lord with my voice : with my voice I made supplication to the Lord.

In His sight I pour out my prayer, and before Him I declare my trouble :

When my spirit failed me, then Thou knewest my paths. In this way wherein I walked, they have hidden a snare for me.

I looked on my right hand, and beheld, and there was no one that would know me.

Flight hath failed me : and there is no one that hath regard to my soul.

I cried to Thee, O Lord ; I said : Thou art my hope, my portion in the land of the living.

Attend to my supplication for I am brought very low, Deliver me from my persecutors for they are stronger than I.

Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise Thy name :

The just wait for me, until Thou reward me.

Now Grace made such haste that on these last words our blessed Father yielded his soul to God. (*The Sisters rise and kneel*). But forthwith, a flight of larks gathered upon our little house and canopied it with so noble a song that in a moment it dried up the fountain of our tears. When the song ceased, our tears broke forth afresh : neither heaven nor earth, nor our Father Francis, spoke to us any more." (*Silence. The LADY CLARE kneels, supported by a Sister. Sighs and sobs*). If God gives us not the grace to do honour to his holy body, and if we must be less happy there than our brothers, that must be but one more cross for our

embrace. We are prisoners of our rule, and, in the chains of our three vows, let us wait for Death to come and break down the twofold rampart of these walls and of our flesh. We live in a house that has no opening save only into heaven. We shall no more see our beloved Father till we behold him glorified.

ALL. We shall not see our dear Father any more till we see him glorified.

CLARE. Let us pray in silence. (*They all prostrate themselves. After a space of silence, a chant is heard—the Miserere broken by cries and lamentations. The ABBESS looks up*). My daughters, listen. They are lifting up the body of our Father. For our consoling, Brother Wind is bringing the voices to our ears. Miserere. . .

SISTERS. Miserere . . .

*Pause. The chanting draws nearer. The Libera. Then the In Paradisum.*

CLARE. My daughters, listen. They have started on their way. Our blessed Father is coming towards the town, where he was born into the world, and also unto God.

*The Sisters kneel upright and listen. The chant draws ever nearer. A great outcry follows the antiphon.*

THE YOUNGEST. But mother—mother—they can't be coming by here?

ALL. They are coming . . . (*confused sounds*).

MOTHER AGNES. To know him so near and not to see him!

THE YOUNGEST. They are beneath the walls of the convent.

ANOTHER. They have opened the doors of the church.

ALL. They are coming in. . .

Our father—our father—coming to us. . .

CLARE. My dearest sisters—you of little faith! My faith was no firmer than yours. Did he not promise you that you should see him again even in this life? The man who believes, makes a promise that he trusts



to God to fulfil. Let us all go close to the grille and receive our Father on our knees.

*She goes to the centre of the grille. The others follow. They draw back the black curtain and kneel in two rows. The choir is lighted up. The processional cross. The procession of clergy and laity carrying torches and branches. In front, Brothers Leo, Juniper, Masseo, Angelo, John: Bernard in the middle. The four brothers who are carrying the body stop by the grille and lift it reverently up. A triumphant Alleluia, in which the sisters join, is followed by a hubbub of voices.*

THE SISTERS. Our Father, our Father—(*they stretch out their arms to him*). Why hast thou deserted us? Left us lonely? Not suffered us all to leave this earth together? To leave behind us the mire of earth and its woes? What shall we do if thou visitest us no more? Father, Father, you rob us of all our consolation. Our merits. Our wisdom. Who now shall teach us to savour poverty? Who shall defend us when the Tempter torments us? O thou that conqueredst temptation! O lover of poverty! (*Pause*) His absence is torture . . . His going rends our hearts. O Father—our Father dead—Death worse than any death. . .

BERNARD. Sisters, be calm. Can you not recall, here in this house of prayer, that the death of a saint is a great feast before God?

CLARE. The more we weep, the more let the brothers rejoice. The Holy women wept over the Body of Our Lord. So too shall we weep, that the angels may sing the gladlier. None shall replace the Father whom we have lost. (*Sobs*).

SISTERS. Can we not see him nearer? touch his clothes? kiss his body? venerate his most holy stigmata?

BERNARD. Our blessed Father who gave you your rule, enclosed you within this grille. What means it,

but your vows ? He alone might have opened to you that grille.

A YOUNG SISTER. Can he not still open it ?

ANOTHER. Can he not still ?

OTHERS. He can ! he can.

*Music. Three mysterious beings enter Right. POVERTY as Giotto painted her : and LADY CHASTITY and LADY OBEDIENCE, after the same style. They approach the grille.*

THE THREE. Poor Ladies, give us room.  
*They look round and make room. The three pass through. Voices.*

POVERTY. In the name of Holy Poverty. . .

CHASTITY. Of Holy Chastity. . .

OBEDIENCE. Of Holy Obedience. . .

THE THREE. Let the grille be raised in the presence of Blessed Francis. He wills to receive the farewell of his daughters within their dwelling.

BERNARD. Who are you ?

CLARE. Ladies, who are you ?

POVERTY. Lady Poverty, his companion.

CHASTITY. Lady Chastity, his spouse.

OBEDIENCE. Lady Obedience, his sister.

THE THREE. And all three we are symbols of the Most Blessed Virgin in whom are united all virtues and who sends us amongst you from St. Mary of the Angels, that from henceforward we may share your dwelling.

*Confused sounds. The crowd and the sisters all kneel.*

*The Three Ladies open the grille which slides away this side and that. They carry into the room the branch-covered litter whereon lies BROTHER FRANCIS.*

*Before the Sisters approach, they address him in turn.*

POVERTY. Glory to thee, Francis, for the night of our espousals, for thou didst not reject my kiss, and together did we break the bread of scorning.

CHASTITY. Glory to thee, Francis, for the night of our chaste wedlock : so fast didst thou bind the cord that it entered into thy very flesh.



OBEDIENCE. Glory to thee, Francis, for the key of they will that thou hast so generously entrusted to me ; to-day I can restore it to thee : to-day it hath opened heaven unto thee. (*She lays the key on the bier*).

CLARE. Glory to thee, beloved Father, for having snared me as a man might a dove—I but a girl, and in my father's close—for having stripped me of all that I loved—all save one sole thing—for having placed me along therewith in my cage. . . . Glory to thee for the one thing necessary that thou hast given me, that thou takest not from me when thou leavest me, and wherein all things else are contained : for from heaven it reigns and it shines, and, sprung from life itself, it welds together all things else that live.

ALL. Glory to thee for thy poor anxious daughters, on whom thou didst lavish joy at the hour of thy most cruel sufferings and who in death alone discover the deep deep agony of thy wounds—

TWO SISTERS. In thy hands (*they kiss his hands*)

TWO SISTERS. In thy feet—

THE YOUNG SISTER. In thy side—

ALL. O Brother Francis (*they all bow over him*).

CLARE. Indeed, indeed, Christ Jesus is come down from His Calvary, and behold Him dead in the arms of the Holy Women. 'Tis they shall lament Him, and cause him to be buried, and then sealed within the sepulchre—

BERNARD. To be raised in glory !

THE BROTHERS. To be raised in glory.

CROWD. In glory—in glory. . .

BERNARD. Glory to thee, Francis, for that thou didst seek thy glory but in the Cross of Christ. But thy death, who shall suffer that ? (*Pause.*)

JUNIPER (*humbly*). Glory to thee, Father, for our unworthiness.

LEO. Glory to thee, Father, for our weakness.

MASSEO. Glory to thee for having taken back from us the world.

BERNARD. Glory to thee, for that thou hast restored to us the world—we knew not how to use it.

JUNIPER. And our humble Mother Earth, to put to shame our vanity.

MASSEO. And our Brother Sun, to put to the blush our impurity.

LEO. And our Sister Water, to put to shame our dryness. . .

ANGELO. And our burning Brother Fire, to shame the chillness of our prayers.

BERNARD. And all that shines in the heavens, and that lives beneath the heavens, morning and evening, winter and spring, all plants, rocks, birds, and roving beasts—

JUNIPER. And our brothers, men, of whom we were the foes.

BERNARD. So that having misused all these, we might hereafter use them aright, and that our eyes may cease to violate the works of God. (*Pause*).  
Glory to thee for all Creation saved!

ANGELO. For nature now baptised.

MASSEO. And for the Church rebuilt.

CLARE. And for our heavenly Sister Grace, that fell like dew upon us—but we suffered it to dry upon our very hands.

JOHN (*prostrating himself*). Glory to thee, Father, for Brother John, who strove to imitate thee and thine every gesture, and had he but better imitated thee, would now be lying here, at thy side—but knew not how to copy thee unto the rendering to his loving Lord his wretched soul, and now, what shall he do therewith?

THE THREE (*pointing to BROTHER JOHN*). Glory to thee, Francis, for this imperfect imitation of that most Perfect Imitation—that Imitation of Jesus Christ that is written on thy flesh.

*Music, dimmed at first, then tremendous.*

A VOICE. Glory to God in His servant.

CROWD. Glory to God in His servant.



A VOICE. In His servant Francis Bernardone.

CROWD. In His servant Francis Bernardone.

A VOICE. May he live in God for ever and for ever!

CROWD. For ever, for ever.

A VOICE. And peace on earth. .

CROWD. Peace on earth. . .

A VOICE. To men of good will.

CROWD. Glory to God—Blessed be the Saint!

*A tumult. A desperate Alleluia soars up from the whole throng. For the last time the Poor Ladies kiss the body of the Saint. The THREE LADIES again lift the bier and place it outside the grille in the care of the brothers. The procession departs. Night, with but a glimmer of the dawn. All the sisters kneel. The THREE LADIES slowly close the grille and draw the curtain. They lift up SISTER CLARE, and supporting her in their arms exeunt with her Left, followed by the sisters. The Alleluias die in the distance. Over the sanctuary lamp nothing can be seen save the miraculous crucifix on the wall, touched with the first ray of the sunrise.*

**Title** Mid Summer Nights Dream

**Author** Armour, A.S.

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26<sup>10</sup>/<sub>66</sub> 1271366

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